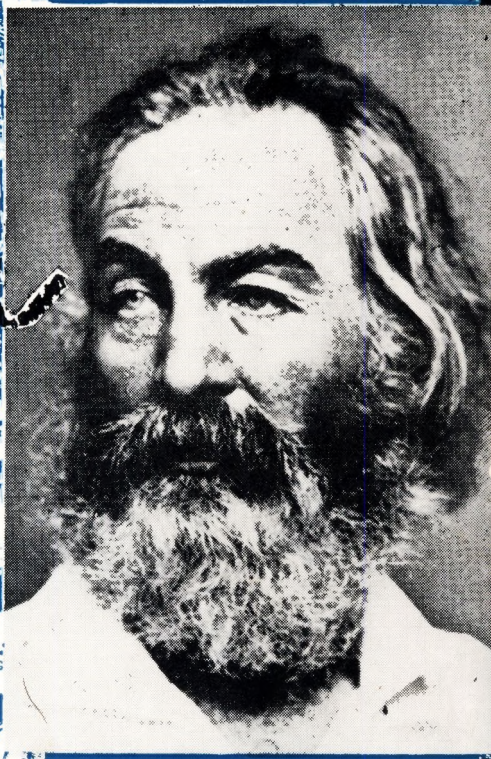
Walt Whitman



Poet Of American Democracy

SELECTIONS FROM HIS POETRY AND PROSE EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

SAMUEL SILLEN

For the 100th Anniversary of "Leaves of Grass"

WALT WHITMAN

POET OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Selections from his Poetry and Prose

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY Samuel Sillen

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For Janet

Preface

This volume of selections from Walt Whitman's writings, together with the introductory essay, was originally published in 1944. It is being re-issued in connection with the world-wide celebration of the 100th anniversary of *Leaves of Grass,* which first appeared on July 4, 1855.

In the past century Whitman's reputation has undergone a remarkable change. *The Fight of a Book for the World* is the fitting title of a book by one of his friends, William Sloane Kennedy, describing the storm-tossed epic of *Leaves of Grass.* The first edition of Whitman's masterwork was a slim volume of 94 pages which the poet had to print himself. Though hailed by Emerson and Thoreau, it was greeted with either silence or abuse in the press. To get a hearing at all, Whitman found it necessary to write anonymous reviews of his own work. The *New York Times* commented on *Leaves of Grass* with an indignant query: "Who is this arrogant young man who proclaims himself the Poet of the time, and who roots like a pig among a rotten garbage of licentious thoughts?" Such perspicacious criticism prompted George Bernard Shaw to exclaim many years later: "Whitman is a classic. . . . Curious that America should be the only country in which this is not as obvious as the sun in the heavens!"

The 100th anniversary of *Leaves of Grass* finds Whitman at last beginning to receive a measure of his due in this country. And the occasion is being celebrated not only in the United States but throughout the world. On the recommendation of the World Peace Council the anniversary will be honored by peace-loving men and women in all lands. For it is universally recognized that Walt Whitman represents what is most vital and elevating in the literature of our nation.

The present collection seems timely even though it first ap-

peared under very different circumstances. In 1944 the country was at war. Together with the Soviet Union and our other Allies, we were battling the armies of Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini. The future of humanity hung in the balance. The specific aim of the book, as the preface to the first edition stated, was to present our richest poetic interpreter of democracy as "a living force in the war against fascist barbarism" as well as in the peace to come. Whitman's vision is of world liberty and fraternity. He inspires us to assert the imperishable dignity of man, to set our faces resolutely toward progress, to strengthen the friendship of peoples. "Whitman teaches us," the preface added, "that we shall surely prevail if only we have the will to unite and the courage to beat down the enemies of democracy wherever they may appear."

These enemies have appeared with sinister force in our own land during the Cold War decade since this was written. The threat to democracy today comes, as Whitman forewarned in *Democratic Vistas,* not from outside the country but from within. The noble heritage of Walt Whitman is under brutal attack by McCarthyism, the American version of fascism. There is a wild witch-hunt against ideas not sanctioned by the corporate interests whose morality Whitman found "depraved." Writers who seek to continue the humanistic tradition of our greatest poet are jailed and blacklisted. Outlawry is pronounced against those who defend the rights of the common man and the ideal of world peace which sustained Whitman in his own collisions with bigotry and demagogy.

Walt Whitman, in his person and in his words, is a devastating rebuke to the warriors who brandish H-bombs and the inquisitors who burn books. He was himself, as he wrote, "the object of two or three pretty serious special official buffetings." He was threatened with prosecution by the District Attorney of Boston in 1881 if he did not withdraw the seventh edition of *Leaves of Grass* from the mails. He was dismissed from a government post in Washington because he had written this "indecent" book. Whitman did not yield. He never trimmed

his beliefs to the prevailing winds. And today he is the America we are determined to defend in the face of the Smith Act and the McCarran Act and how many other fascist-style statutes that justify their aggression against democracy under the frayed and spurious banner of "anti-Communism."

Who that has read Whitman truly can believe that he would submit to a repression aimed at the soul of America? He poured contempt on that parcel of windy liars, as he called them, who hypocritically make "a great ado with the word Americanism, a solemn and great word" while they perform deeds that "would eat the faces off the succeeding generations of common people worse than the most horrible disease." And he went on, in "The Eighteenth Presidency," to warn his countrymen against those who in the false name of Americanism poison the air with "penal conscience laws and test oaths."

Whitman is cherished by Marxists, as by all other supporters of democracy, because he is the implacable foe of human oppression in any form. Men of socialist vision have always responded to the great strivings of the poet for a better world.

For the writer in our country today this poet is a tremendous challenge. In adversity he did not retreat to the wastelands of cynicism. He sought his strength in the people. It is little wonder that an anti-democratic poet like Ezra Pound, snobbish and small of heart, could complain: "It is impossible to read *Leaves of Grass* without swearing at the author almost continuously." For the author of *Leaves of Grass* embraced humanity and his highest wish was to make his poetry serve humanity. He is the poet of those who do not fear the future. That is why he is anathema to the decadents. That is why he inspires the great national poets of our time, like the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda, whose "Let the Railsplitter Awake" is a passionate Whitmanesque ode:

"Give me your voice and the strength of your buried breast,
Walt Whitman, and the solemn roots that are your face
So as to sing of these reconstructions!"

Walt Whitman is an unwavering partisan of peace and democ-

racy; and only a volume that is partisan in this sense could truly represent the poet who wrote that "No one will get at my verses who insists upon viewing them as a literary performance, or attempt at such performance, or as aiming mainly toward art or aestheticism."

It is my hope that the present arrangement of Whitman's poetry and prose according to theme will help illuminate his basic interests and attitudes. My effort as an anthologist has been twofold. I have tried to be as faithful as possible to Whitman's own arrangement at the same time that I have made regroupings that would appear logical to the general reader. Thus, I have retained Whitman's own procedure with regard to the Civil War and the Lincoln poems; on the other hand, I have assembled his international poems, now scattered through *Leaves of Grass,* under one heading.

Most of the poems in this volume are complete in themselves; wherever abridgements were necessary, because of length, they have been indicated. For a number of excerpts I have provided titles based on Whitman's phrasing; the title of the complete work is noted at the end of these excerpts.

If this volume of selections helps in any measure to secure for Whitman those "great audiences" that he demanded for great poetry, it will have amply achieved its intention. I am convinced that the American people and their best writers, as was predicted by Randolph Bourne, "will yet rescue Thoreau and Whitman and Mark Twain and try to tap through them a certain eternal human tradition of abounding vitality and moral freedom, and so build out the future."

January 15, 1955 S. S.

THE POET OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

BY SAMUEL SILLEN

"I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so many generations hence." And with us he is, more securely than any other poet of our land. For no voice has affirmed so passionately the forward sweep and democratic hope of American life. No poet has been so faithfully of and for the people, the "exhaustless, intelligent, brave and reliable rank and file." None could boast so justly that his love of freedom would be a "battle-call" that would rouse people "years, centuries hence." Long forgotten are the bigots who branded him crank, infidel, fanatic; Walt Whitman proudly endures, a contemporary ever renewed.

Leaves of Grass, as Emerson said, is "The American Poem," and its author is beyond cavil our supreme national poet. In time of crisis we turn as naturally to him as we do to Jefferson or Lincoln for a definition of our primary belief. His titanic song of democracy is a treasury from which we draw resolution and confidence, the will to struggle for ennobling purposes.

This rich and complex personality has been glibly called the "problem child of American literature." He has been variously treated as mystic and materialist, individualist and socialist, chauvinist and cosmopolite. Amateur psychologists have done their worst on him, confusing the warmth and breadth of his nature with sexual aberration. He has been claimed as a spiritual ancestor by literary bohemians, anarchists, free-lovers, and other devotees of a life relieved of social discipline. Whitman has been taken too literally at his word: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes.)"

But the total man cannot be arrived at by mechanically adding up the partial portraits. An adequate perspective is needed wherein the apparent contradictions may be united. Whitman's own

philosophical premise holds that the universe is a constantly evolving organism which shows the greatest possible unity in the greatest possible diversity. And of himself he wrote that he was "One, yet of contradictions made." It is necessary to examine his central attitudes very closely so that what he calls the "knit of identity" may be clear.

Whitman gave the vital clue to his largest meaning. "In estimating first-class song," he wrote, "a sufficient Nationality ... is often, if not always the first element." A sufficient Nationality was indeed the first element, infusing all other elements, of Whitman as poet, citizen, critic. Proud of his nation's past, intensely hopeful of its future, he sought to create an image of the land, the people, the *idea* of America. He intended the thread-voice running through the separate chants to be that of "an aggregated, inseparable, unprecedented, vast, composite, electric *democratic nationality*." (Whitman's emphasis.) He believed that "the central point in any nation, and that whence it is itself really sway'd the most, and whence it sways others, is its national literature, especially its archetypal poems." Whitman therefore strove to be the spokesman of a whole people, the poetic focus of the historic trials and aspirations of his countrymen. And it was because he so amply succeeded that he could say, in all truth, that he was large and contained multitudes.

A superficial reading of the poet may easily lead to an opposite conclusion. It may seem that he is the irrepressible egocentric and rugged individualist par excellence. Such lines as "I celebrate myself, and sing myself" and "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world" may appear to be the mere trumpeting of temperament. Were this impression sound, there would be no basis for considering Whitman primarily as a national poet.

But if Whitman's lines are read in context, and if his poems are judged in the light of his whole development, a quite different meaning emerges. Actually, the "I" in Whitman is never separable from the "We." Through him, as he insists, speak the people; through him speak runaway slave, deck-hand, Yankee factory girl, President, immigrant, mechanic, the Negro woman sold at the auction stand:

And these tend inward to me, and I tend outward to them,
And such as it is to be of these more or less I am,
And of these one and all I weave the song of myself.

With reference not to "parts" but to "ensemble" did he conceive his poems. The "Song of Myself" was to become "I Hear America Singing" and this in turn was to become "an internationality of poems." There is more than casual significance in his choice of his major symbol—*grass:*

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white.

In celebrating himself, Whitman celebrates mankind. The opening inscription to *Leaves of Grass* is a key to his thinking and poetic method:

One's self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

For Whitman rejected as utterly false the conventional opposition between individual and group, atom and aggregate. The concept of individualism, he says in *Democratic Vistas,* is meaningless without the concept of sociality, the first "asserting itself, and cropping forth" from its apparent antithesis: "The two are contradictory, but our task is to reconcile them." As an admiring student of Hegel, Whitman envisaged a dialectical solution of this "serious problem and paradox in the United States." Seeing the virtue of modern individualism threatening to usurp the ancient virtue of patriotism, "the fervid and absorbing love of general country," he expresses the hope that "the two will merge, and will mutually profit and brace each other, and that from them a greater product, a third, will arise."

Leaves of Grass, viewed as a whole, is a restless striving toward such synthesis. Whitman desires to be inclusive. He scorns the arbitrary separations inherited from dualistic philosophy: "I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul." And he

rejects the discriminations of social practice: "I am the poet of the woman the same as the man." He is suspicious of mechanical time concepts that exclude yesterday and tomorrow from the present moment; critically absorbing the past, flooding himself "with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides," he addresses himself to the future.

Whitman once said: "I believe in Darwinianism and evolution from A to izzard." In the eternal process of change he found the assurance of progress, marked by the steady erasure of distinctions founded on caste and superstition. This distrust of unnatural exclusions, this effort to achieve a creative synthesis of the best ideas of past and present, deeply colored his conception of the nation and his own role as national poet. He sought to combine not only the individual with the en-masse,. but also the identity of the states with the superior identity of the Union, the most fervent love of country with the broadest internationalism, the values of pre-industrial America with those that must govern an America that has achieved world power. And permeating all these inclusions, "In the centre of all, and object of all, stands the Human Being, towards whose heroic and spiritual evolution poems and everything directly or indirectly tend, Old World or New." The "great Idea" of his work, wrote Whitman, is that of "perfect and free individuals."

He believed that such humanistic breadth was the unique mission of America and the American poet. It was Whitman's conviction that

Any period one nation must lead,
One land must be the promise and reliance for the future.

In the span of Whitman's lifetime that nation was clearly America. Unencumbered with a feudal past, born in struggle against oppression, "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," our land was a beacon for humanity. During the Civil War, as Karl Marx wrote to Lincoln: "The workingmen of Europe felt instinctively that the star-spangled banner carried the destiny of their class." America and democracy are convertible terms, Whitman repeatedly em-

phasized. Watching from afar the decay of tyrannical systems, the poet saw that, following our example, the only sure path for other countries was to *democratize,* not whether, "but *how,* and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize." Whitman did not celebrate America merely because it was his country "right or wrong," but because it held out the greatest promise for the advance of the plain people. He was not blind to the faults of the land he loved; and more and more, as we shall see, he was troubled by the "interior" threat to democracy.

To *democratize* was the function of American poetry, which, for the first time in history, was confronted on a national scale with "O such themes—equalities! O divine average." For such poetry new forms were required suited to a new spirit. Whitman, as we shall see, did not hesitate to break with preconceptions regarding language and meter; as literary craftsman he carried out the implications of his basic position.

Attachment to the people is the origin of his liberating force. "I advance from the people in their own spirit." That was Whitman's creed first and last. The poet of America was of necessity a people's poet. He was fortified by "a scientific estimate and reverent appreciation of the People—of their measureless wealth of latent power and capacity, their vast, artistic contrasts of lights and shades—with, in America, their entire reliability in emergencies, and a certain breadth of historic grandeur, of peace or war, far surpassing all the vaunted samples of book-heroes, or any *haut ton* coteries, in all the records of the world."

It is only against the background of the great social questions of his age that Whitman's development can be traced. For, contrary to those biographers who, like Bliss Perry, speak of his "evident detachment from the pressing concerns of American life," the man was vitally concerned as poet and citizen with every central issue of his time. Whitman did not woo posterity by holding aloof from his contemporaries. He wanted to express the reality of "current" America. "I know very well," he wrote, "that my *Leaves* could not possibly have emerged or been fashion'd or completed, from any other era than the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, nor any land than democratic America, and from the absolute triumph of the National Arms."

Not only the latter, but the earlier half of the century fashioned his work. The Civil War cuts across his life, dividing it into two major phases as it does the life of the nation. Unlike so many writers of his time, Whitman cannot be treated primarily in terms of his work either before or after the war. By the end of the war Poe, Thoreau, and Hawthorne were dead; Emerson, Bryant, and Whittier had seen their best days. A flowering New England had begun to wither. Younger men like Mark Twain and William Dean Howells had only begun their writing careers. But Whitman flourished in both halves of the century. His earliest views were formed in a predominantly agrarian America; they were to be tested and strengthened in an industrial America. The first half of his life was deeply affected by the anti-slavery struggle, the second half by an economy that raised the threat of industrial slavery. Increasingly, it became necessary to redefine democracy in the light of a more complex and a more sharply class-divided civilization. The struggle for nationalism had to be combined with the struggle for internationalism. Thus, while there is a striking continuity in Whitman's development, there are, inevitably, different stresses at different periods of his career. To follow his life is to chart the course of American growth from the days of the young republic to the threshold of the twentieth century world power.

The best writing, Whitman once said, has no lace on its sleeves, and there is no hint of lace in his own life. He told his young Socialist friend Horace Traubel: "Day by day in these older years of my life, I see how lucky I was that I was myself thrown out early upon the average earth—to wrestle for myself—among the masses of the people—never living in coteries: that I have always lived cheek by jowl with the common people—yes indeed, not only bred that way but born that way."

He was born on a farm at West Hills, near Huntington, Long Island, on May 31, 1819. He who was to celebrate the composite character of America was himself of mixed English, Dutch, and Welsh ancestry. His people were far from well-to-do. Walter Whitman senior was a struggling carpenter, a proud acquaintance

of Thomas Paine and a subscriber to Frances Wright's radical *Free Enquirer*. The Quaker simplicity of the household fostered tolerance and independence. Two of Walt's brothers were named after Jackson and Jefferson; and if the poet did not inherit the name, he absorbed in the family atmosphere the spirit of these great champions of the common man whom he was always to revere. The American Revolution was living history to a boy who exulted, as he wrote in an early poem, "In the freedom achieved by our ancestral sages."

Like that other Lincoln of our literature, Mark Twain, Walt had to leave school before he was twelve; and, like Twain, he was soon launched on a newspaper man's career that was materially to shape his knowledge and point of view. He was printer's devil, compositor, free-lance writer, and then, at twenty, editor of his own small paper; he taught school for a time on Long Island. Practical politics he learned as a worker for the Jacksonian Democracy, electioneering for Van Buren in 1840, bitterly denouncing Tyler and the Whigs in front of New York's City Hall the following year. An early literary effort, the fictional temperance tract *Franklin Evans* (1842) was shoddy but popular. By 1846 he was sufficiently established as a journalist to be made editor of the fairly influential Brooklyn *Daily Eagle*.

Here he commented editorially on a range of subjects suggesting the diversity of his interests and the bent of his mind. He attacks the employers who pay horribly low wages to their working women; he demands laws that will pry out every man who helps the slave traders; he asks for an enlightened school system in which flogging is prohibited; he points out that the question of whether there shall be slavery in the new territories won through the Mexican War "is a question between *the grand body of white workingmen, the millions of mechanics, farmers, and operatives of our country,* with their interests, on the one side—and the interests of the few thousand rich, 'polished,' and aristocratic owners of slaves at the south, on the other side." The busy editor reports his visits to the slums, police courts, hospitals, steamboat excursions, political meetings, and so on. Moreover, he comments on the opera, theater, and a multitude of books, urging his readers to stop patronizing the cataracts of

slavish imitations of foreign writers and to be more just to the good American writers.

Within two years, in 1848, the enterprising editor of the *Daily Eagle* was fired because he dared champion Free Soil principles, opposing the extension of slavery to new states, in that Democratic paper. This was an important turning point in his life. Whitman had been an ardent Democrat, working for close to a dozen Democratic organs, at a time when Jefferson's memory was still fresh and Jackson's influence pronounced. His optimistic democracy, his unwavering faith in the masses, his hatred of privilege and caste are rooted in this early era of the republic. Yet his party attachment, in a changed political situation, helps account for a lag in his thinking about national problems. Unlike Emerson and Thoreau and Lowell, he had supported the pro-slavery Polk administration during the Mexican War of 1846-47. Clinging to outworn shibboleths of states' rights, he had criticized Abolitionism as an unwarranted interference with southern prerogative. Sympathizing with the moral purpose of the anti-slavery movement, he had opposed its programs as dangerous for the survival of the Union.

But by 1848 slavery had become the paramount national issue, and it had become inescapably necessary to judge all parties anew in the light of this issue. Slowly, but with mounting indignation, Whitman realized that the plantation owners aided by the "Hunkers," or pro-slavery Democrats in the North, were turning the party of national progress into the reactionary instrument of an increasingly aggressive slavocracy. Like William Cullen Bryant, editor of the New York *Post,* Whitman fought this change and became a "Barnburner" seeking to retain the Jeffersonian ideal. "The influence of the slavery institution," he wrote in the *Eagle,* "is to bring the dignity of labor down to the level of slavery, which God knows! is low enough." Such a view, combined with his open advocacy of the Free Soil organizations forming in 1848, led to the rupture between Whitman and his party. After the *Eagle* episode, he went to New Orleans as editor of the *Daily Crescent,* but he returned shortly to take charge of the Brooklyn *Freeman,* a Free Soil paper. In August, 1848, he

was appointed as a Brooklyn delegate to the Free Soil convention in Buffalo.

There has been a strong tendency to minimize Whitman's activity in relation to the overriding national question of slavery. The facts are more fortunate than the conjectures. By 1850, Whitman was beginning to publish his first free verse in Horace Greeley's New York *Tribune,* and these poems deal directly with political issues. "Blood-Money" parallels Whittier's "Ichabod" in its biting attack on Daniel Webster for supporting the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850; "The House of Friends" excoriates northern pro-slavery Democrats as "Doughfaces, Crawlers, Lice of Humanity" to whom a dollar is more dear than Christ's blessing. Another 1850 poem, "Resurgemus," proclaims that the European revolutionary movements of 1848, laid low for the moment, will rise again to achieve democracy: "Liberty, let others despair of thee, But I will never despair of thee."

That Whitman was far from "detached" is abundantly revealed in his manuscript "Anti-Slavery Notes," which show the real temper of his mind. "Every one that speaks his word for slavery," he writes, "is himself the worst slave." Real Americans cannot be made out of slaves or the masters of slaves, he adds, warning that the Abolitionists should not be scorned because they are few: "A few, resolute and enthusiastic are more than a match for thousands." Whitman describes himself going to an anti-slavery meeting and sternly, fiercely delivering "an oration of liberty—up-braiding, full of invective—with enthusiasm." He foresees that oppressive laws like the Fugitive Slave Act threaten war, but he prefers war to the ossification of spirit which will come of acquiescing in the "one vast model plantation" which the slaveholders would like to establish: "Give us turbulence, give us excitement, give us the rage and disputes of hell, all this rather than this lethargy of death that spreads like a vapor of decaying corpses over our land."

In the decade before Lincoln's election, the supreme test of progressive action was resistance to the expansive designs of the slavery states. To live at all, slavery had to extend its sway, politically and economically, over new territories and states; to oppose its growth, therefore, was to undermine its existence.

Whatever his disagreements with the Abolitionists, Whitman was entirely with them in fighting the encroachments of the slavery power, and in the course of the decade he was driven inexorably, like Lincoln, to a head-on collision with it.

There is no more forceful document of this fateful period than Whitman's "The Eighteenth Presidency," a slashing indictment of Fillmore and Buchanan as agents of "the three hundred and fifty thousand owners of slaves" who aspire "to sponge the mastership of thirty millions." Addressed in 1856 to the laboring population of the country, this is a campaign message in support of John C. Fremont, the first Republican candidate for President. "Is the word Abolitionist so hateful to you, then?" asks Whitman. "Do you know that Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and all the great Presidents and primal warriors and sages were declared Abolitionists?" The people must abolish slavery or slavery will abolish them; and this volcanic pamphlet, which remained in galley proofs until 1928, urges that the evil laws passed by a slavery-dominated Congress be defied "by speech, by pen, and, if need be, by the bullet and the sword." Whitman prophesies the appearance of a Redeemer President, "not to be exclusive but inclusive."

Whitman's blistering attack on pro-slavery politicians in "The Eighteenth Presidency" was written just one year after the appearance of the first *Leaves of Grass* edition. For several years before 1855 he had been without any specific editorial connection; he had made a living by joining his father as a house-builder. Riding the Brooklyn Ferry, watching the busy life of Manhattan from the top of a Broadway coach, mingling with workers, reflecting on the new currents in science and art, absorbing eagerly the sights and sounds of an America bursting with rapid growth, he felt a stirring identification with his fellow human beings. The old poetic forms, he began to feel, were too narrow to contain the active spirit and teeming advance of America. The old poetic diction could not convey the earthy vigor of the American idiom. Far too inadequate were the conventional and sentimental rhymes of his earlier newspaper verse. A new instrument must be

forged to capture this new reality. It must be at once more personal and more democratically embracing than any heretofore conceived. "Give us American plays... fitted to American opinions and institutions," Whitman had urged in the Brooklyn *Eagle*. And he was now preparing the original American poem to meet his own specifications.

The slender volume of ninety-four pages that he issued in 1855 included the most rousing literary manifesto, by way of preface, and the nucleus of the greatest poetic work ever created, before or since, on this continent. Whitman had to print the little book himself, setting up the type in a Brooklyn shop. Of the thousand copies printed, he later claimed, not a single one was actually sold. The Boston *Intelligencer,* attributing the book to an escaped lunatic, called it a "heterogeneous mass of bombast, egotism, vulgarity, and nonsense." The London *Critic* informed its readers that "Walt Whitman was as unacquainted with art as a hog is with mathematics." Literary editors were scandalized by the poet's portrait, facing the title page, which revealed not a pale imitation of Tennyson, but a workingman with open flannel shirt, slouch hat, clipped beard—a common, ordinary American, and therefore by definition incapable of poetry.

But the greatest of Whitman's literary contemporaries, and the one whose opinion he respected most, sent a warm letter—the most famous in our literature—that made up for all the abuse. In 1850 Ralph Waldo Emerson had observed that "the Poet of America is not yet come. When he comes he will sing differently." Emerson recognized his voice in 1855. "I find it," he wrote of *Leaves of Grass,* "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our western wits fat and mean. I give you joy of your free and brave thought... I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start...."

It was in truth only a beginning, for by the tenth edition published before Whitman's death, the tiny volume was to expand

enormously not only in size but in poetic range, power, and maturity. Yet the 1855 kernel contained within itself the fundamental spirit and form of Whitman's entire development.

The preface is a ringing declaration of Whitman's creed as a national poet. "The United States themselves," he writes, "are essentially the greatest poem," and the country "awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it." The first nation to be built on the idea of liberty, its theme is creative and has vista. It rejects none, acknowledging nothing in the universe more divine than men and women. The great test of American poetry must be: "Is it uniform with my country? Are its disposals without ignominious distinctions? Is it for the ever-growing communes of brothers and lovers, large, well united, proud, beyond the old models, generous beyond all models?" To be uniform with the country, art must be bold, simple, confident. It must not be demeaned to romance, for realism is the proper expression of democracy as romance is of feudalism. It must reject supernaturalism and embrace science. It must be unhesitatingly candid whether it deal with the human body or the spirit, with money-making or legislation. For the poet is expected by the people "to indicate the path between reality and their souls."

Whitman was of course not the first to emphasize the need for an independent national literature. Earlier in the century, many writers had protested the subservience to foreign models and the sense of cultural inferiority that pervaded American letters. In his "Lectures on Poetry" (1825-26) William Cullen Bryant had encouraged writers to turn to native themes which rivaled the treasures of Europe. And in 1837 Emerson had delivered at Harvard his address on "The American Scholar," which Oliver Wendell Holmes aptly termed our "intellectual Declaration of Independence." These predecessors had stoutly opposed the superstition that the American people were too unmannered, unlettered, and heterogeneous, too lacking in tradition to create a national culture.

But it was Whitman's 1855 Preface that gave the knockout blow to the snobbish prejudice expressed in the famous query of the Reverend Sydney Smith: "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" Whitman did not apologize for

the alleged failings of democracy as the soil of culture; he announced that these failings were in fact virtues. Were Americans too unmannered? The great artist *avoids* elegance, for "The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity." Were Americans too active? But the poet does not bring sheltered fatness and ease, "The touch of him, like Nature, tells in action." Was America too concerned with liberty? "In the make of the great masters the idea of political liberty is indispensable." Too practical? "Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support." Too crude? "Men and women, and the earth and all upon it, are to be taken as they are.... All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor."

Thus, Whitman combined the ideal aspirations of Emerson's transcendental philosophy with an insistence on material facts and the common people. Whitman's work marked the transition from the romantic to the realistic tradition in American literature. But more than that, he suggests how much is lost in the tendency to separate the literature that aspires from the literature that merely records. In modern critical thought, Whitman's 1855 Preface is a nodal point where the romantic and realistic strains are intertwined.

Believing as he did that content should govern the form of expression, Whitman consciously used a new kind of poetic speech. In a little known but highly illuminating book, *An American Primer,* he noted that *Leaves of Grass* was a great experiment in the language of democratic poetry. "It is an attempt," he wrote, "to give the spirit, the body and the man, new words, new potentialities of speech—an American, a cosmopolitan (for the best of America is the best cosmopolitanism) range of self-expression." Whitman went far beyond William Wordsworth in his striving to take words out of the library into the street. He scorned what he termed the delicate lady-words and the gloved gentleman-words. In his *Primer* he reflected that "around the markets, among the fish-smacks, along the wharves, you hear a thousand words, never yet printed in the repertoire of

any lexicon." He shared the American appetite for "unhemmed latitude, coarseness, directness, live epithets, expletives, words of opprobrium, resistance...."

In this respect, as in so many others, it is interesting to recall Whitman's kinship with Jefferson. Back in 1813 Jefferson had answered the *Edinburgh Review's* attack on America for "adulterating" the English language: "Certainly so great a growing population, spread over such an extent of country, with such a variety of climates, of productions, of arts, must enlarge their language to make it answer its purpose of expressing all ideas, the new as well as the old. The new circumstances under which we are placed, call for new words, new phrases, and for the transfer of old words to new objects. An American dialect will therefore be formed...." Similarly, Whitman believed, as he said in an essay on "Slang in America," that language is "not an abstract construction of the learn'd, or of dictionary makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground. Its final decisions are made by the masses, people nearest the concrete, having most to do with actual land and sea."

Whitman listened to these masses, hovering at the edge of a crowd, or joining in with gusto, noting the rich flashes of wit and poetry that darted from a gang of railroad men, miners, or boatmen. And the language of his poems, which strikes the prissy as uncouth, has at once dignity, color, and force. It is therefore totally unlike that of Tennyson, who, as Whitman wrote, reflected "the uppercrust of his time, its pale cast of thought—even its ennui." Whitman's approach to language is, if not in manner, at least in principle, closer to Burns, who "treats natural occurrences not in a genteel style of gilt or china but in their own atmosphere, laughter, sweat." He seeks to give "The blab of the pave, tires of carts, sluff of boot-soles, talk of the promenaders...."

His desire to celebrate America coincides with his relish for names like "Monongahela—it rolls with venison richness upon the palate." Such aboriginal names roll through his poems, as in these two lines:

Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chattahoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco,
Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla....

And by contrast, in order to suggest the composite character of American nationality, his lines are studded with foreign words like the Spanish "Americanos," the Mexican "Libertad," the French "Allons," "Ma Femme," "Feuillage," the Italian "Viva" and "Romanza." His attempt to blend the ideal and the real in his diction led Emerson to describe it as "a remarkable mixture of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* and the *New York Herald*."

Whitman departs not only from the language, but from the meters and rhymes of traditional poetry. He believed that "the truest and greatest *Poetry,* (while subtly and necessarily always rhythmic, and distinguishable easily enough,) can never again, in the English language, be express'd in arbitrary and rhyming meter, any more than the greatest eloquence, or the truest power and passion." While admitting that "there have been very illustrious poets whose shapes the mantle of such verse has beautifully and appropriately envelopt," Whitman was certain that the day of conventional meter and rhyme was ended. For the modern muse a much greater freedom and flexibility was required. The time had arrived, Whitman insisted, to break down the formal barriers between prose and poetry.

Such views on modern versification may have been needlessly sweeping, but there is no doubt that the free verse form created by Whitman was the right form for his purpose and temperament. His long, irregular, swinging line—the most original and liberating contribution to poetic technique in America—enables him to go directly to his creation. His utterance is at once informal and impassioned. If it produces the effect of a chant, that was precisely his intention:

For you a programme of chants.
Chants of the prairies,
Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican sea.

The declamatory character of Whitman's verse reflects his earlier self-training as an orator in the great age of American oratory. Quite deliberately, he produces the effect of a speaker addressing a crowd on the public square:

I am for those that have never been master'd...
I am for those who walk abreast with the whole earth.

Or:

The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who are here for him,
The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,
The Congress convenes every Twelfth-month for you,
Laws, courts, the forming of States, the charters of cities, the going and coming of commerce and mails, are all for you.

In such lines, the editor and plain citizen, the orator and poet are one.

Whitman was not unaware that the absence of rhyme and regular stress would at first strike his reader "with incredulous amazement." But he was hardly prepared for the storm of abuse that was to greet his new verse form. Genteel critics from 1855 on have denounced what a Brahmin like Barrett Wendell called the "decadent eccentricity" of his style. They accused Whitman of artistic laziness and exhibitionism, looseness and vulgarity. They attributed his esthetic pioneering to ignorance and ineptitude.

Yet modern scholarship has demonstrated that Whitman was anything but slovenly in technique; he was a highly conscious artist. A detailed study of his manuscripts and notebooks has led C. J. Furness, editor of *Walt Whitman's Workshop,* to the conclusion that they reveal "habits so studious that Whitman himself wished to conceal them from the public, who were already too dependent, he thought, upon bookish literature.... Most of his conceptions were the logical outgrowth of sustained and

detailed study." If he rejected some poetic conventions, he mastered the devices of repetition and parallelism in the Bible and folk poetry. The range of influences on his work includes Homer, Shakespeare, and Italian opera. A sensitive reading of his elemental and dynamic lines confirms Whitman's own faith that they are "lawless at first perusal, although on closer examination a certain regularity appears, like the recurrence of lesser and larger waves on the sea-shore, rolling in without intermission, and fitfully rising and falling."

This is not to deny the crudities and defects that were present in the little 1855 volume and were never quite sloughed off. In his effort to embrace multitudes, Whitman often indulges in long catalogues:

I see the cities of the earth and make myself at random a part of them,
I am a real Parisian,
I am a habitant of Vienna, St. Petersburg, Berlin, Constantinople,
I am of Adelaide, Sidney, Melbourne,
I am of London, Manchester, Bristol, Edinburgh, Limerick,
I am of Madrid, Cadiz, Barcelona, Oporto, Lyons, Brussels, Berne, Frankfort, Stuttgart, Turin, Florence.
I belong in Moscow, Cracow, Warsaw, or northward in Christiania or Stockholm, or in Siberian Irkutsk....

Similarly, Whitman piles up the names of objects:

Hoe, rake, pitchfork, pencil, wagon, staff, saw,
Jack-plane, mallet, wedge, rounce,
Chair, tub, hoop, table, wicket, vane, sash, floor,
Work-box, chest, string'd instrument, boat, frame, and what not....

There is, of course, a reason for such catalogues in Whitman's mind. In the first passage (from "Salut Au Monde"), he is asserting the idea of universality; in the second (from "Song of the Broad-Axe"), he is naming the manifold objects shaped from the forests of America. But in such passages, what Whitman seeks

to gain by accumulation he loses by lack of selectivity. He scatters his force, and he dangerously overburdens the reader.

Whitman is at his worst when he becomes too discursive, yet even his roving and inflated passages reflect the expansiveness of his age. In the years from Whitman's birth to the appearance of *Leaves of Grass* in 1855, the American population had grown from less than ten million to over thirty million, pushing constantly westward on canals and railroads:

Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding,
Outward and outward and forever outward.

These years had witnessed the rise of the factory system, the shift from merchant to industrial capital, great waves of immigration and the growth of cities. Capital invested in manufacturing had increased from 50 million to nearly one billion dollars. Small wonder that the dominant images of the country are of speed, turbulence, "the procreative urge":

Expanding and swift, henceforth ...
See, in my poems, immigrants continually coming and landing ...
See, in my poems, cities, solid, vast, inland, with paved streets, with iron and stone edifices, ceaseless vehicles, and commerce,
See, the many-cylinder'd steam printing-press—see, the electric telegraph stretching across the continent....
See, ploughmen ploughing farms—see, miners digging mines—see, the numberless factories.

In 1855, as Vernon Louis Parrington writes, "Borne up by the caressing waters, repressing nothing, rejecting nothing, he [Whitman] found life good in all its manifestations ... and as he yielded to the stimulus of the environing present his imagination expanded, his spirits rose to earth's jubilee, his speech fell into lyric cadences, and from the exalted abandon of egoistic experience there issued a strong note of the universal." There seemed no end to the interlinked, food yielding lands; life in America was prodigal, and Whitman was the bard of its springtime.

But the land was to be burned and scarred in the four grim years of Civil War. The great contradiction of American life that Whitman had mirrored was bound to explode. The nation could not endure half slave and half free; the conflict between a rising capitalism and a reactionary slave system was irrepressible. For Whitman there was only one decision. He had registered it in 1856 when he supported the Republican Party in its first campaign. He had reaffirmed it in 1860, when, openly allying himself with the Abolitionists, he came to the Boston Courthouse to defend, by force if necessary, Frank B. Sanborn, whom Federal officers were trying to arrest because of his connection with John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry.

Only in this great national crisis, "the real parturition years (more than 1776-'83)," could Whitman infallibly be tested, as Lincoln was tested. And surviving the test, he emerges a much greater poet whose humanity has deepened and whose strength, though unabated, has become more disciplined and mature. Years later Whitman recalled that while he had made a start before, the final reasons-for-being of his song date "only from the occurrence of the Secession War, and what it show'd me as by flashes of lightning with the emotional depths it sounded and arous'd (of course I don't mean in my own heart only, I saw it just as plainly in others, in millions)...."

In others, in millions. That is highly significant, for it suggests that Whitman's sense of collective experience and emotion was greatly heightened in the course of the war, never to be lost. It is not so much that Whitman's attitudes change. It is rather that, confirmed by intimate and tragic experience, they lose a certain rhetorical character of assertion and gain in depth, insight, and overtone. In the war, with "The People, of their own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, insolently attack'd by the secession-slavepower," democracy had effectively justified itself "beyond the proudest claims and wildest hopes of its enthusiasts." Whitman had seen American men, peaceable and good-natured, unused to regimental discipline, springing to arms; he had seen them in trenches, crouching behind breastworks, tramping in deep mud, "bearing steadily on, cheery enough, hollow-bellied from hunger, but sinewy with unconquerable resolution."

Some writers, like Thomas Wentworth Higginson, have asserted that Whitman shirked the responsibilities of war. They say he loafed and invited his soul. But this is utterly false. We have the testimony not only of Whitman's poetry, but of his letters, war diary, and newspaper dispatches from the front. Even before the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter he had written that the poet is the most deadly force of war: "Who recruits him recruits horse and foot .... he can make every word he speaks draw blood." He too used words as weapons, as did Julia Ward Howe and James Russell Lowell. He too threw himself heart and soul into the fight for freedom.

Like Bryant and Bret Harte, he wrote an effective recruiting song which, in the demoralized days after Bull Run, gave heart to men. In "Beat! Beat! Drums!" he bursts into the solemn church to scatter the congregation and into the school where the scholar is cloistered:

Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? No sleepers must sleep in those beds,
No bargainers' bargains by day—no brokers or speculators—would they continue?

For this, wrote Whitman in another poem, "1861," this is the armed year of struggle and there is no room for dainty rhymes; this is a time not for pale poetlings but for strong men advancing in blue with rifles on their shoulders; this is the year of the shock electric, with the blood of the city up, and the poet has charged himself to compose a march for these states.

With his Quaker inheritance, Whitman was scarcely one to embrace war for its own sake. Loving mankind, he loved peace. But understanding clearly the justice and necessity of the war Lincoln led, he did not waver in its support. Forty-two when the war broke out, he volunteered to work at the Broadway Hospital in New York tending wounded soldiers. At the end of 1862 he went to Virginia to find his brother George, wounded at Fredericksburg. Here he had his first direct contact with the front. He stayed on as a volunteer nurse in Washington's ramshackle

military hospitals; for the duration he was a tireless, devoted nurse.

In those days of poor anesthesia and asepsis, suffering could be intolerably cruel, and Whitman does not prettify suffering in his hospital dispatches to the New York newspapers. Writing on "The Great Army of the Wounded" (New York *Times,* Feb. 26, 1863), he observed: "The military hospitals, convalescent camps, etc., in Washington and its neighborhood, sometimes contain over fifty thousand sick and wounded men. Every form of wound (the mere sight of some of them having been known to make a tolerably hardy visitor faint away), every kind of malady, like a long procession, with typhoid fever and diarrhoea at the head as leaders, are here in steady motion." In "A Glimpse of War's Hell-Scenes" he described the torment and mutilation of battle. The real war, he said, would never get in the books.

But he prefers to dwell on the bravery of "our American man —how he holds himself cool and unquestioned master above all pains and bloody mutilations." In the army hospitals he finds the marrow of the tragedy, not only its suffering but its dignity. He treats the men, some of them boys of only fifteen, with loving care, and he is proud when the doctors tell him that his comfort and sympathy provide "a medicine which all their drugs and bottles and powders are helpless to yield." He writes letters home for the wounded, supplies them with brandy and blackberries and tobacco plug. To raise money for these luxuries he writes urgent appeals to friends up North like Emerson and Bronson Alcott.

He was himself quite poor, by no means famous, struggling along on a small wage earned by copying documents for the Paymaster's Office. And finally his own health broke down. Despite the doctors' warnings, he had continued too long to expose himself to disease, and one may trace his long and painful invalidism to this period of absolute devotion.

During these years his political views matured. The war proved to him, as it did to Lincoln, that the victory of "democratic nationality" was impossible without Negro emancipation. He treasured newspaper clippings reporting the prowess of a Negro engineering regiment and the great skill of Negro pilots on

United States ships. He followed eagerly stories about the arming of Negroes in the West. He was deeply moved by Lincoln's reply to a Maryland deputation that had come to protest his taking Negroes for soldiers. The President told the slaveholders that he would take all he could possibly get, not only from Maryland but from all the border states and all the slave states: "The necessities of the country demand it & it should be done." Whitman gave his mother an account of a Washington parade that included "five very full regiments of new black troops, under Gen. Ferrero," looking and marching proudly, the President standing with his hat off to them.

The Copperheads he despised. To his friend Lewis Kirk Brown he wrote, on August 1, 1863: "I don't believe it is destined that this glorious Union is to be broken up by all the Secesh South, or Copheads north either." On Election Day, 1863, Whitman was in Brooklyn. The election was crucial, for it was the first held since the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's win-the-war policy was at stake. The appeasement Democrats had won great gains the preceding year; in New York they were particularly powerful. Whitman jubilantly reported to his hospital comrades in Washington: "... I went up to the polls bright and early—I suppose it is not necessary to tell you how I voted—we have gained a great victory in this city—it went union this time, though it went democratic strong only a year ago, and for many years past—and all through the State the election was a very big thing for the union—I tell you the copperheads got flaxed out handsomely—indeed these late elections are about as great a victory for us as if we had flaxed General Lee himself, and all his men...."

Scorning the obstructionists in Congress as traitors, Whitman wrote his mother from Washington on April 10, 1864: "There are exciting times in Congress—the Copperheads are getting furious and want to recognize the Southern Confederacy. This is a pretty time to talk of recognizing such villains after what they have done, and after what has transpired the last three years. After first Fredericksburg I felt discouraged myself, and doubted whether our rulers could carry on the war—but that has passed

away. The war must be carried on, and I could willingly go myself in the ranks [he was 45] if I thought it would profit more than at present, and I don't know sometimes but I shall as it is. Mother, you don't know what a feeling a man gets after being in the active sights and influences of the camp, the army, the wounded, etc. He gets to have a deep feeling he never experienced before—the flag, the tune of Yankee Doodle and similar things, produce an effect on a fellow never such before." And two days later: "I was up in Congress very late last night. The House had a very excited night session about expelling the men that want to recognize the Southern Confederacy. You ought to hear the soldiers talk. The soldiers are excited to madness.... The soldiers are true as the North Star."

The poetic expression of these years of agony and triumph is *Drum-Taps,* a collection of verse published first as a separate volume in 1865 and later incorporated as an integral part of *Leaves of Grass.* Unquestionably the greatest body of Civil War poetry, it achieves an effect that transcends the particular war and country with which it deals. It is a world masterpiece of war literature. It records imperishably the grief and heroism, the tragic comradeship, the "large conflicting fluctuations of despair & hope" of the Civil War. That war, as Whitman said, was not "a quadrille in a ball-room," and into its expression he poured the fathomless tenderness and compassion of his nature.

Through it all, he sees an America that formerly had learned from joys and prosperity, now learning from crises of anguish, advancing, showing the world what her children en-masse really are. Beginning with a call to action, the poems move through the scenes of battle, and end on a note of reconciliation and hope. In the prelude Whitman recalls how his beloved Manhattan,

Sleepless amid her ships, her houses, her incalculable wealth,
With her million children around her, suddenly,
At dead of night, at news from the south,
Incens'd struck with clinch'd hand the pavement.

In "The Wound-Dresser" he recalls his heart-breaking experiences as a nurse:

On, on I go, (open doors of time! open hospital doors!)
The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand tear not the bandage away,)
The neck of the cavalry-man with the bullet through and through I examine,
Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye, yet life struggles hard,
(Come sweet death! be persuaded O beautiful death! In mercy come quickly.)
From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand,
I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the matter and blood,
Back on his pillow the soldier bends with curv'd neck and side falling head,
His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on the bloody stump,
And has not yet look'd on it.

And from such unsparing lines—without which any poetry of war is dishonest and corrupt—Whitman is driven neither to despair nor Pollyannish escapism. Over the carnage rises a prophetic voice: the problems of freedom will be solved; the land will be healed:

One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian's comrade,
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregonese, shall be friends triune,
More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth.

As Whitman recognized, these poems of war, reflecting his growth, have less verbal superfluity and shrillness than most of his previous work, a greater fidelity to the nuances of feeling.

All but the first few copies of *Drum-Taps* include a "Sequel" which contains the beautiful poem on Lincoln's death, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." "For Whitman," as Carl Sandburg writes, "Lincoln was a great voice and a sublime doer in the field of democracy. He regarded both Lincoln and himself as a foreteller of a New Time for the common man and

woman." For the poet, Lincoln was indeed the supreme expression of America's democratic urge. Had the Greeks known this man, he wrote, they would have celebrated him in epics and dramatic trilogies. Only this king of Democracy, prouder than Agamemnon, was a man of the people, a powerful western star guiding the people to "the greatest revolutionary step in the history of the United States... the absolute extirpation and erasure of slavery from the States...."

Whitman first saw Lincoln in February, 1861, when the President-elect stopped briefly in New York enroute to his inauguration ceremonies. In the streets of Washington the poet and the President saw each other frequently. "We have got so that we exchange bows, and very cordial ones," Whitman noted. He was impressed by the President's sad expression, the portrait of which could be done only by a Plutarch, Aeschylus, and Michael Angelo rolled into one. At first, Whitman, like Harriet Beecher Stowe or Wendell Phillips, was unsure of the President's ability to guide the nation through its worst storm. But his conduct of the war was to disperse such doubts.

When Lincoln died, Whitman was grief-stricken. He wrote: "The tragic splendor of his death, purging, illuminating all, throws round his form, his head, an aureole that will remain and will grow brighter through time, while history lives, and love of country lasts. By many has this Union been help'd; but if one name, one man, must be pick'd out, he, most of all, is the conservator of it, to the future." And in later years, Whitman's most popular lecture, delivered by him with unfailing passion, was on the Martyr Chief, "Dear to the Muse—thrice dear to Nationality—to the whole human race...."

A few months before Lincoln's death, Whitman had been appointed to a clerkship in the Department of the Interior. One day, the bigoted Secretary of the Department, James Harlan, snooped around in the clerk's desk, found a copy of *Leaves of Grass,* threw up his hands in horror, and fired the author of "an indecent book" that mortally offended his prurient mind. Ironically, the effect of this action was to create more national fame for Whitman than the poems had been able to achieve by them-

selves. One of the poet's friends, William O'Connor, abolitionist and radical, issued a pamphlet entitled *The Good Gray Poet* which not only defended the government clerk successfully but gave him the affectionate name that was to become so familiar.

This was neither Whitman's first nor last encounter with a grotesque prudery that even to this day surrounds his name with suspicion. One Boston newspaper had already suggested "no better reward than the lash for such a violation of decency" by an author who "should be kicked from all decent society as below the level of the brute." Even a more friendly reader like Charles Eliot Norton had written to James Russell Lowell that "The book is such, indeed, that one cannot leave it about for chance readers, and I would be sorry to know that any woman had looked into it past the title page." To which the best answer had been given by Henry Thoreau: "One woman told me that no woman could read it,—as if a man could read what a woman could not."

Whitman disturbed the hypocritical hush of Puritanism. He denied the body's vileness, and he refused to divorce realities from words. When Whitman came up against Comstockery he found it too nasty to compromise with. He was reminded of what Heine had once said to a lady who expressed some suspicion about the body: "Madame, are we not all naked under our clothes?" Throughout his career he was advised to expurgate, expurgate, expurgate; but he stuck to his guns, confident of the integrity of his intention, willing to brave the storm. And one of his great services to American art was his fight against "evasions and swathing suppressions," against the furtive and sneaking treatment of sex:

Underneath all is the Expression of love for men and women,
I swear I have seen enough of mean and impotent modes of expressing love for men and women,
After this day I take my own modes of expressing love for men and women.

Looking back, it is hard to see what all the fuss was about, just as it is hard to see why Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* or

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* should have provoked such scandals. If anything, the modern reader is likely to find that, outside of a few poems, Whitman's treatment of sex is too abstract and over-idealized. Of what is usually termed coarseness there is not the slightest trace.

The question of Whitman's alleged abnormality has produced a whole literature of conjecture; uninformed critics have rushed into print with clinical opinions, borrowed from their readings in Freud, which are supposed to give us the "key" to the poet's personality and work. Thus, Ludwig Lewisohn, in his *Expression in America,* magisterially asserts that Walt Whitman was "a homosexual of the most pronounced and aggressive type," and that therefore his appeal is not among the masses, whose "healthy instinct" is to turn away, but among "the febrile and effeminate." The conclusion of this remark is fantastic enough to damn its premise. Whitman himself was in a better position to judge, and it is at least worth noting his opinion, in a letter to John Addington Symonds, who had praised his courage in portraying homosexual desires: "*Leaves of Grass* is only rightly to be construed by and within its own atmosphere and essential character—all its pages and pieces so strictly coming under. That the *Calamus* part has ever allowed the possibility of such construction as mentioned [in Symonds' letter] is terrible. I am fain to hope that the pages themselves are not to be even mentioned for such gratuitous and quite at the same time undreamed and unwished possibility of morbid inference—which are disavowed by me and seem damnable." And that critics like Mr. Lewisohn should on such gratuitous grounds dismiss not only Whitman but all admirers of his poetry seems thrice damnable.

Properly construed, "by and within its own atmosphere and essential character," *Leaves of Grass* preaches the worth of human fraternity and love. It embraces men and women alike. It teaches people not to be ashamed of their desires. Whatever the final analysis of Whitman's psychological life may reveal, the poems are not morbid but healthy, not "febrile and effeminate" but sane and robust.

After his dismissal from the Interior Department for writing "an indecent book," Whitman was transferred to the Attorney

General's Office, whhere he remained until 1873. These post-war years in Washington had a sobering effect. The middle-class democracy of Whitman's youth had triumphed over the slave system, and this triumph had in turn released the gigantic forces of an industrialism that was to put to a severe test the moral fabric of democracy. The victorious fate of the Jeffersonian ideal could not now be assumed with simple confidence. Life was becoming infinitely more complex. Capitalism was on the march, achieving miracles of technique and organization while generating ever deeper economic crises, producing a modern working class while threatening the authority of the common man. Steel and Carnegie, oil and Rockefeller, meat-packing and Armour, railroads and Leland Stanford—hand in hand with the giant machines came the giant monopolies. The "gold conspiracy" of Jay Gould and James Fisk, the "whiskey ring," the "Tweed ring," the "Credit Mobilier"—these were the offensive symptoms of a new economic brigandage. In these years of unprecedented growth and unprecedented corruption, Whitman at Washington followed the course of events, trying to estimate the troubling pattern, asking its meaning for the country's future.

The great challenge of this period evoked *Democratic Vistas* in 1871. This is a redefinition of Whitman's national creed in terms far sterner and more penetrating than were possible in the pre-war epoch. Whitman was now haunted by the fear that the democratic idea might, at least temporarily, disintegrate under the pressure of ruthless economic self-seeking. He was alarmed by the absence of a common national purpose, by "conflicting and irreconcilable interiors, and the lack of a common skeleton, knitting all close...." He was shocked by "the depravity of the business classes" and the maladministration of national, state and municipal government. In the era of Boss Tweed, "The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism." The mad scramble for money by the mob of fashionably dressed speculators reminded him of the fable in which the magician's serpent ate up all the other serpents, "and money-making is our magician's serpent."

It is a measure of Whitman's greatness that he did not for a moment reject the industrial age; he was not opposed to material

progress as such; he did not preach a return to an agrarian era. On the contrary, "I hail with joy the oceanic, variegated, intense practical energy, the demand for facts, even the business materialism of the current age, our States." Whitman is the great poet of American technical progress. In "Song of the Exposition," written the same year as *Democratic Vistas,* he declares:

With latest connections, works, the inter-transportation of the world,
Steam-power, the great express lines, gas, petroleum,
These triumphs of our time, the Atlantic's delicate cable,
The Pacific railroad, the Suez canal, the Mont Cenis and Gothard and Hoosac tunnels, the Brooklyn bridge,
This earth all spann'd with iron rails, with lines of steamships threading every sea,
Our own rondure, the current globe I bring.

Nor does Whitman reject "keen-eyed towering science," which he describes as the twin of democracy:

I accept Reality and dare not question it,
Materialism first and last imbuing.
Hurrah for positive science! long live exact demonstration.

This is not to suggest that Whitman was a consistent philosophical materialist, for he never did cast off the idealistic elements of his thinking inherited from Emerson and Hegel. His theories of nature and history, when subjected to rigorous analysis, betray a curious amalgam of metaphysical and scientific ideas. But the significant tendency of his outlook is from transcendentalism to science, and not the reverse. The direction of his intellectual development, with whatever inconsistencies, is from Hegel to Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley, whom he regarded as among the "master-pilgrims" of the age.

Certain that from a business and productive viewpoint America would soon outstrip all previous examples, Whitman nevertheless warned that this country would prove "the most tremendous failure of time" unless democratic ideas took hold of the subsoil of national life, going beyond the political frame, invigorating

the moral conscience which deification of the dollar was enfeebling. Whitman had long since been outraged by the spectacle of

Many sweating, ploughing, thrashing, and then the chaff for
payment receiving,
A few idly owning, and they the wheat continually claiming.

And now a grave danger loomed over America: "having certain portions of the people set off from the rest by a line drawn—they not privileged as others, but degraded, humiliated, made of no account." It is time, he began to insist, for more solid achievement and less windy promise; America must betake herself to formative action, cease to recognize theories of character grown out of feudal aristocracies, and illustrate the truth that "The average man of a land at last only is important."

In the years of great industrial strife, beginning with the panic of 1873, running through the bloody railroad strikes of 1877 and the Haymarket massacre of 1886, Whitman was deeply troubled by "the more and more insidious grip of capital." Democracy, he noted, was not simply an "abstract question," but a question of "social and economic organization"; and in his jottings for a lecture on "The Tramp and Strike Questions" he defined the economic rights of the working masses as an essential ingredient of liberty. He was scarcely complacent. Quite bluntly he concluded: "We've got a hell of a lot to learn yet before we're a real democracy: we've gone beyond all the others, very far beyond some, but we're far from having achieved our dream.... We'll get there in the end: God knows we're not there yet."

The day had not yet come, for example, for the realization of Whitman's dream that women would enter practical life and politics. In a fully democratic society, he said, women must be as great as men in all departments, "the robust equals, workers." As the supreme poet of women's equality, Whitman celebrated

The wife, and she is not one jot less than the husband,
The daughter, and she is just as good as the son,
The mother, and she is every bit as much as the father.

The equality of other groups had to be fought for too: the immigrants, the religious minorities, the people of diverse racial stocks, the "reformers and revolutionists [who] are indispensable to counterbalance the inertness and fossilism making so large a part of human institutions."

Contemplating the problems of democracy in an industrial age, Whitman acknowledged that at times he had been dejected. He saw clearly the "defective streaks" in the people, among whom existed the credulous and the unfit. The people were sometimes lethargic, slow, allowing themselves to be milked by demagogues. But from such "sickly moods" he soon recovered. Whitman wished that the people believed in themselves as much as he believed in them. They were his final reliance. "I must insist on the masses," he said. "I never have any doubts of the future when I look at the common man."

This unyielding democrat was inevitably attracted to socialist ideas and to young Socialists like Horace Traubel. Expressing sympathy with William Morris' socialism, he did not share the English poet's understanding of and active participation in the labor movement. Yet he was reaching, as he told Traubel, "for a new politics—for a new economy." "Sometimes," he said, "I think, I feel almost sure, Socialism is the next thing coming: I shrink from it in some ways: yet it looks like our only hope." And he was capable of warning the anti-democratic monopolists and politicians that "history will deal in a very drastic fashion with opposition like that should it become too stubborn."

Whitman continued to hope that this opposition to the realization of democracy would not become too stubborn. "I am an evolutionist," he said, stressing his desire for a peaceful transition to a society that would achieve, on both the economic and political level, the great promise of American democracy. Toward such a society, in which men and not money would be crowned, he resolutely looked, and it is little wonder that his broad vision inspired a Eugene V. Debs, who recognized in Whitman "The Prophet of Democracy." A socialist humanist like Maxim Gorky appreciated deeply the quality of Whitman's belief that "Literature is big only in one way—when used as an aid in the growth of the humanities—a furthering of the cause of the masses—a

means whereby men may be revealed to each other as brothers."

It was with this conviction and purpose that he continued to write to the very end of his life, even though by 1875 he had done his best work. A paralytic attack in 1873 forced him to give up his work in Washington. From then until his death on March 26, 1892, he spent most of his time in Camden, New Jersey, where he bought the now famous house on Mickle Street in 1884. In poor health, lame, suffering from paralytic strokes, he retained his freshness of spirit. He made a little money by occasional lectures, which enabled him to travel from time to time, by the sale of his books in England, and by the help of kind friends. His friends of this period were enthusiastic disciples. John Burroughs, the naturalist, and the Canadian Richard Maurice Bucke hailed *Leaves of Grass* as "the bible of democracy" and wrote warm studies of their master. Pete Doyle, former Confederate soldier and now a street-car conductor, was another loyal friend. Mrs. Anne Gilchrist, an English author who had been the first woman to defend Whitman, fell in love with him through his poetry, corresponded with him, and finally came with her children to Philadelphia to be near the poet. Young Horace Traubel came to see him every day toward the end of his life, faithfully gathering every scrap of manuscript, jotting down every word of conversation with more than Boswellian devotion.

In her autobiography, *We Are Many,* Ella Reeve Bloor has given us a memorable picture of the poet, whom she knew as a child in Camden. With the other children on Mickle Street, Ella gathered around the marble steps where the aging poet came to sit of an evening, a gray plaid shawl around his shoulders, a big soft hat on his head. To ride the Camden ferry with the poet was to be a partner in a great human adventure. He communicated an ecstatic joy in the physical world and a great love for people. Most of his acquaintances long remembered his striking figure and sympathetic personality. William Dean Howells, who first met the poet in 1860, described his fine head, with its cloud of Jovian hair, the branching beard and mustache, the gentle eyes. John Burroughs portrayed a large, slow-moving figure, gray-clad, with broad-brimmed hat, who could frequently be seen on the front platform of the street horse-cars chatting with the driver.

Lincoln is reported to have said of him: "Well, *he* looks like a *man*."

Whitman's conception of literature—"a means whereby men may be revealed to each other as brothers"—is a key to his world outlook. Our greatest national poet is also our most vigorous spokesman of the international ideal. It is true that in a rough draft of one of his early poems Whitman had written: "America isolated I sing, against all the remainder of the earth...." But his entire subsequent development refutes the view expressed in Percy H. Boynton's *Literature and American Life* that the poet was committed to "magnificent isolation" and was "utterly devoid of any sense of internationalism." The fact is that, as with Jefferson and Lincoln, an intense love of country nourished an intense desire to help bring about the peaceful fraternity of all peoples. Whitman once said, in a characteristic mood: "I don't want the brotherhood of the world to be so long a-coming. I can wait till it comes—it is sure to come—but if I can hurry it by a day or so I am going to do so." *Leaves of Grass,* he added, "is significant (if significant at all) as affecting a world, not simply an American purpose."

His internationalism, to be sure, has nothing in common with a rootless cosmopolitanism. Scorning self-willed expatriates, the poet would have agreed with his early contemporary, the Russian critic, Vissarion Belinsky, that "whoever does not belong to his land of birth does not belong to humanity in general." Yet he emphasized, in turn, that the true patriot rejects a narrow chauvinism. In his preface to a German translation of his work he declared that "The chief reason for being of the United States of America is to bring about the common good will of all mankind, the solidarity of the world." Whitman believed that it was the historic mission of America, as the first great land of democracy, to serve as a moral and political influence in the molding of world unity. For the most alluring record of democracy, he wrote, is that "it alone can bind, and ever seeks to bind, all nations, all men, of however various and distant lands, into a brotherhood, a family."

It was therefore his intention to inaugurate from America "new formulas, international poems." Believing, as Maxim Gorky phrased it many years later, that literature is "the International of the Spirit," Whitman addressed himself as an envoy to the foreign reader, binding him closer than formal treaties. He envisaged, with glowing faith, a time of the "solidarity of races," "nations communing," "humanity forming en-masse." And he hoped that songs like his, radiating from all lands, would hasten that time.

Political developments abroad he followed with a deep interest that was clearly reflected in his poems. He was especially concerned, of course, with the strivings of the people. His "Europe" is a stirring comment on the democratic uprisings of 1848 in Italy, France, and Germany, culminating in the enforced exile of revolutionary patriots, so many of whom were to reach our shores. The poem warns that younger men "with unslaughter'd vitality" will carry on the struggle for freedom. Whitman returns to the same theme in "To a Foil'd European Revolutionaire," in which he urges the "brother or my sister" abroad to keep up courage until the inevitable day of victory. In 1871, when the Prussians defeated France, he wrote his "O Star of France," which expressed for his time the feelings of our own generation when the Nazis marched into Paris "by traitors sold." Again, in his poem "France," he celebrates the French Revolution in retrospect as a great dawning day for humanity, like 1776. And in his "Spain," written after the defeat of the uprising in 1873, he is hopeful that the people will one day come into their own. There is in all these poems not a trace of defeatism. They are calls to action. They are filled with the unfaltering assurance of national liberation.

As Clifton Joseph Furness has observed, the poet's interest in Russia "forms a fascinating unwritten chapter in the dawning of Whitman's inclusive international consciousness. The subject of Russia, its characters and activities, seems to have claimed considerable attention from him." Whitman kept extensive notes (now in the Library of Congress) of his readings in Russian history, economics, and literature. He noted with sympathy the popular movements against the Tsar, and he was pleased to learn

in 1881 that an Irishman named Fitzgerald Lee was preparing a Russian translation which, as Dr. Lee assured him, "would doubtless be prohibited [by the] government but that would not prohibit its spread much, rather the contrary." As a preface to this intended translation Whitman wrote the message, reprinted in this collection, on America's kinship with Russia, a message of such startling prophetic insight that it will surely rank with Whitman's most memorable declarations.

This poetic envoy has been well received abroad. In a mood partly of dejection and of pride, Whitman once told Horace Traubel: "I have made no gains this side to equal my victories across the sea." Indeed, it was Whitman's reputation in England and Germany around 1870 that first brought him any widespread recognition in this country. In England he was applauded by Tennyson and Swinburne (who later changed his mind), by William Michael Rossetti and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, by Edward Dowden and John Addington Symonds; the English Socialists hailed him as a forerunner. In Germany he was translated by Ferdinand Freiligrath, who had written revolutionary poetry in the days of '48 and had worked closely with Marx and Engels. Ivan Turgenev planned to translate *Leaves of Grass* by "an amazing American poet." Far and wide, the name of Whitman was becoming a symbol of the liberated spirit.

In view of Whitman's special interest in the Russian people, it is worth noting that his greatest foreign success was to be in Russia. Under the Tsar, he had to be read surreptitiously, of course. In 1905, Korney Chukovsky was tried for printing a translation of "Pioneers! O Pioneers," and in 1911 his book of translations was ordered destroyed. But following the Socialist Revolution of 1917 Whitman became a best-seller and exerted tremendous influence on Soviet poetry. Red Army soldiers have cheered the recital of Chukovsky's translation of "Beat! Beat! Drums!" which Whitman had written as a recruiting song in our own Civil War. And Chukovsky himself, in the preface to his new translation of *Leaves of Grass* (1935), tells us that to Mayakovsky, the leading poet of the Soviet era, "Walt Whitman was dear ... as a forerunner." There is thus an interesting link

between the nineteenth century poet of American democracy and the twentieth century poet of Soviet socialism. Referring to Whitman in a letter to another Russian poet, Demyon Bedny, Joseph Stalin wrote in 1924: "It's very good that you are in a 'happy mood.' The philosophy of *Weltschmerz* is not our philosophy. Let those grieve who are passing away and have outlived their time." And Stalin added that the optimism of Walt Whitman's poetry "stated our outlook fairly accurately."

On American literature Whitman's influence has of course been profound. The democratic writer's debt to him is beyond calculation. He shattered outworn molds of thought, releasing energies that had been inhibited by Puritanism, polite estheticism, and cultural snobbery. He turned men's eyes to the people. One may trace his liberating influence on poetry from Edwin Markham's "Man with the Hoe" to Carl Sandburg's *The People, Yes.* Such dissimilar novelists as Theodore Dreiser, Sherwood Anderson, Michael Gold, and Thomas Wolfe derived from him a desire to come to grips with America. The free, vital, and progressive elements in our literary culture owe more to him than to any other figure.

Nothing could be more wrong-headed than the conclusion of a V. F. Calverton that Whitman "was a great progressive force in terms of his day but not in terms of to-day." Whitman does not date. He presses on into the future. The world is going his way. And, as John Burroughs predicted in 1896, "The more democratic we become, the more we are prepared for Whitman; the more tolerant, fraternal, sympathetic we become, the more we are ready for Whitman; the more we inure ourselves to the open air and to real things, the more we value and understand our own bodies, the more the woman becomes the mate and equal of the man, the more social equality prevails,—the sooner will come to Whitman fullness and fruition."

He too, like the Lincoln of his poem, is a powerful western star. He too, beyond death, arouses echoes in our hearts and guides us to the just triumph of a democratic America and a peaceful mankind.

"To have great poets, there must be great audiences too."

1. The Poet and the People

ONE'S-SELF I SING

One's-Self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

SONG OF MYSELF

...This is the city and I am one of the citizens,
Whatever interests the rest interests me, politics, wars, markets, newspapers, schools,
The mayor and councils, banks, tariffs, steamships, factories, stocks, stores, real estate and personal estate.

The little plentiful manikins skipping around in collars and tail'd coats,
I am aware who they are, (they are positively not worms or fleas,)
I acknowledge the duplicates of myself, the weakest and shallowest is deathless with me,
What I do and say the same waits for them,
Every thought that flounders in me the same flounders in them.

I know perfectly well my own egotism,
Know my omnivorous lines and must not write any less,
And would fetch you whoever you are flush with myself.

Not words of routine this song of mine,
But abruptly to question, to leap beyond yet nearer bring;
This printed and bound book—but the printer and the printing-office boy?
The well-taken photographs—but your wife or friend close and solid in your arms?
The black ship mail'd with iron, her mighty guns in her turrets—but the pluck of the captain and engineers?

In the houses the dishes and fare and furniture—but the host and hostess, and the look out of their eyes?
The sky up there—yet here or next door, or across the way?
The saints and sages in history—but you yourself?
Sermons, creeds, theology—but the fathomless human brain,
And what is reason? and what is love? and what is life? ...

I do not say these things for a dollar or to fill up the time while I wait for a boat,
(It is you talking just as much as myself, I act as the tongue of you,
Tied in your mouth, in mine it begins to be loosen'd.)

I swear I will never again mention love or death inside a house,
And I swear I will never translate myself at all, only to him or her who privately stays with me in the open air.

If you would understand me go to the heights or water-shore,
The nearest gnat is an explanation, and a drop or motion of waves a key,
The maul, the oar, the hand-saw, second my words.

No shutter'd room or school can commune with me,
But roughs and little children better than they.

The young mechanic is closest to me, he knows me well,
The woodman that takes his axe and jug with him shall take me with him all day,

The farm-boy ploughing in the field feels good at the sound of my voice,
In vessels that sail my words sail, I go with fishermen and seamen and love them.

The soldier camp'd or upon the march is mine,
On the night ere the pending battle may seek me, and I do not fail them,
On that solemn night (it may be their last) those that know me seek me....

There is that in me—I do not know what it is—but I know it is in me.

Wrench'd and sweaty—calm and cool then my body becomes,
I sleep—I sleep long.

I do not know it—it is without name—it is a word unsaid,
It is not in any dictionary, utterance, symbol.

Something it swings on more than the earth I swing on,
To it the creation is the friend whose embracing awakes me.

Perhaps I might tell more. Outlines! I plead for my brothers and sisters.

Do you see O my brothers and sisters?
It is not chaos or death—it is form, union, plan—it is eternal life—it is Happiness.

The past and present wilt—I have fill'd them, emptied them,
And proceed to fill my next fold of the future.

Listener up there! what have you to confide to me?
Look in my face while I snuff the sidle of evening,
(Talk honestly, no one else hears you, and I stay only a minute longer.)

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)

I concentrate toward them that are nigh, I wait on the door-slab.

Who has done his day's work? who will soonest be through with his supper?
Who wishes to walk with me?

Will you speak before I am gone? will you prove already too late?
The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,
I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last scud of day holds back for me,
It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds,
It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift it in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
Missing me one place search another,
I stop somewhere waiting for you.

THE DEMOCRATIC MUSE

Come Muse migrate from Greece and Ionia,
Cross out please those immensely overpaid accounts,
That matter of Troy and Achilles' wrath, and Æneas', Odysseus' wanderings,
Placard "Removed" and "To Let" on the rocks of your snowy Parnassus,
Repeat at Jerusalem, place the notice high on Jaffa's gate and on Mount Moriah,
The same on the walls of your German, French and Spanish castles, and Italian collections,
For know a better, fresher, busier sphere, a wide, untried domain awaits, demands you....
Not only all the world of works, trade, products,
But all the workmen of the world here to be represented.

Here shall you trace in flowing operation,
In every state of practical, busy movement, the rills of civilization,
Materials here under your eyes shall change their shape as if by magic,
The cotton shall be pick'd almost in the very field,
Shall be dried, clean'd, ginn'd, baled, spun into thread and cloth before you,
You shall see hands at work at all the old processes and all the new ones,
You shall see the various grains and how flour is made and then bread baked by the bakers,
You shall see the crude ores of California and Nevada passing on and on till they become bullion,
You shall watch how the printer sets type, and learn what a composing-stick is,
You shall mark in amazement the Hoe press whirling its cylinders, shedding the printed leaves steady and fast,
The photograph, model, watch, pin, nail, shall be created before you....

Away with old romance!
Away with novels, plots and plays of foreign courts,
Away with love-verses sugar'd in rhyme, the intrigues, amours of idlers,
Fitted for only banquets of the night where dancers to late music slide,
The unhealthy pleasures, extravagant dissipations of the few,
With perfumes, heat and wine, beneath the dazzling chandeliers.

To you ye reverent sane sisters,
I raise a voice for far superber themes for poets and for art,
To exalt the present and the real,
To teach the average man the glory of his daily walk and trade,
To sing in songs how exercise and chemical life are never to be baffled,
To manual work for each and all, to plough, hoe, dig,
To plant and tend the tree, the berry, vegetables, flowers,
For every man to see to it that he really do something, for every woman too;
To use the hammer and the saw, (rip, or cross-cut,)
To cultivate a turn for carpentering, plastering, painting,
To work as tailor, tailoress, nurse, hostler, porter,
To invent a little, something ingenious, to aid the washing, cooking, cleaning,
And hold it no disgrace to take a hand at them themselves.

—From *Song of the Exposition*

BY BLUE ONTARIO'S SHORE

...I listened to the Phantom by Ontario's shore,
I heard the voice arising demanding bards,
By them all native and grand, by them alone can these States be fused into the compact organism of a Nation.

To hold men together by paper and seal or by compulsion is no account,
That only holds men together which aggregates all in a living

principle, as the hold of the limbs of the body or the fibres of plants.

Of all races and eras these States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets, and are to have the greatest, and use them the greatest,
Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall.

(Soul of love and tongue of fire!
Eye to pierce the deepest deeps and sweep the world!
Ah Mother, prolific and full in all besides, yet how long barren, barren?)

Of these States the poet is the equable man,
Not in him but off from him things are grotesque, eccentric, fail of their full returns,
Nothing out of its place is good, nothing in its place is bad,
He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportion, neither more nor less,
He is the arbiter of the diverse, he is the key,
He is the equalizer of his age and land,
He supplies what wants supplying, he checks what wants checking,
In peace out of him speaks the spirit of peace, large, rich, thrifty, building populous towns, encouraging agriculture, arts, commerce, lighting the study of man, the soul, health, immortality, government,
In war he is the best backer of the war, he fetches artillery as good as the engineer's, he can make every word he speaks draw blood,
The years straying toward infidelity he withholds by his steady faith,
He is no arguer, he is judgment, (Nature accepts him absolutely,)
He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling round a helpless thing,
As he sees the farthest he has the most faith,
His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things,
In the dispute on God and eternity he is silent,

He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement,
He sees eternity in men and women, he does not see men and women as dreams or dots.

For the great Idea, the idea of perfect and free individuals,
For that, the bard walks in advance, leader of leaders,
The attitude of him cheers up slaves and horrifies foreign despots.

Without extinction is Liberty, without retrograde is Equality,
They live in the feelings of young men and the best women,
(Not for nothing have the indomitable heads of the earth been always ready to fall for Liberty.)

For the great Idea,
That, O my brethren, that is the mission of poets.

Songs of stern defiance ever ready,
Songs of the rapid arming and the march,
The flag of peace quick-folded, and instead the flag we know,
Warlike flag of the great Idea.

(Angry cloth I saw there leaping!
I stand again in leaden rain your flapping folds saluting,
I sing you over all, flying beckoning through the fight—O the hard-contested fight!
The cannons ope their rosy-flashing muzzles—the hurtled balls scream,
The battle-front forms amid the smoke—the volleys pour incessant from the line,
Hark, the ringing word *Charge!*—now the tussle and the furious maddening yells,
Now the corpses tumble curl'd upon the ground,
Cold, cold in death, for precious life of you,
Angry cloth I saw there leaping.)

Are you he who would assume a place to teach or be a poet here in the States?
The place is august, the terms obdurate.

Who would assume to teach here may well prepare himself body and mind,

He may well survey, ponder, arm, fortify, harden, make lithe himself,
He shall surely be question'd beforehand by me with many and stern questions.

Who are you indeed who would talk or sing to America?
Have you studied out the land, its idioms and men?
Have you learn'd the physiology, phrenology, politics, geography, pride, freedom, friendship of the land? its substratums and objects?
Have you consider'd the organic compact of the first day of the first year of Independence, sign'd by the Commissioners, ratified by the States, and read by Washington at the head of the army?
Have you possess'd yourself of the Federal Constitution?
Do you see who have left all feudal processes and poems behind them, and assumed the poems and processes of Democracy?
Are you faithful to things? do you teach what the land and sea, the bodies of men, womanhood, amativeness, heroic angers, teach?
Have you sped through fleeting customs, popularities?
Can you hold your hand against all seductions, follies, whirls, fierce contentions? are you very strong? are you really of the whole People?

Are you not of some coterie? some school or mere religion?
Are you done with reviews and criticisms of life? animating now to life itself?
Have you vivified yourself from the maternity of these States?
Have you too the old ever-fresh forbearance and impartiality?
Do you hold the like love for those hardening to maturity? for the last-born? little and big? and for the errant?

What is this you bring my America?
Is it uniform with my country?
Is it not something that has been better told or done before?
Have you not imported this or the spirit of it in some ship?
Is it not a mere tale? a rhyme? a prettiness?—is the good old cause in it?

Has it not dangled long at the heels of the poets, politicians, literats, of enemies' lands?
Does it not assume that what is notoriously gone is still here?
Does it answer universal needs? will it improve manners?
Does it sound with trumpet-voice the proud victory of the Union in that secession war?
Can your performance face the open fields and the seaside?
Will it absorb into me as I absorb food, air, to appear again in my strength, gait, face?
Have real employments contributed to it? original makers, not mere amanuenses?
Does it meet modern discoveries, calibres, facts, face to face?
What does it mean to American persons, progresses, cities? Chicago, Kanada, Arkansas?
Does it see behind the apparent custodians the real custodians standing, menacing, silent, the mechanics, Manhattanese, Western men, Southerners, significant alike in their apathy, and in the promptness of their love?
Does it see what finally befalls, and has always finally befallen, each temporizer, patcher, outsider, partialist, alarmist, infidel, who has ever ask'd any thing of America?
What mocking and scornful negligence?
The track strew'd with the dust of skeletons,
By the roadside others disdainfully toss'd.

Rhymes and rhymers pass away, poems distill'd from poems pass away,
The swarms of reflectors and the polite pass, and leave ashes,
Admirers, importers, obedient persons, make but the soil of literature,
America justifies itself, give it time, no disguise can deceive it or conceal from it, it is impassive enough,
Only toward the likes of itself will it advance to meet them,
If its poets appear it will in due time advance to meet them, there is no fear of mistake,
(The proof of a poet shall be sternly deferr'd till his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorb'd it.) . . .

TO A CERTAIN CIVILIAN

Did you ask dulcet rhymes from me?
Did you seek the civilian's peaceful and languishing rhymes?
Did you find what I sang erewhile so hard to follow?
Why I was not singing erewhile for you to follow, to understand—nor am I now;
(I have been born of the same as the war was born,
The drum-corps' rattle is ever to me sweet music, I love well the martial dirge,
With slow wail and convulsive throb leading the officer's funeral;)
What to such as you anyhow such a poet as I? therefore leave my works,
And go lull yourself with what you can understand, and with piano-tunes,
For I lull nobody, and you will never understand me.

THE MESSAGE OF GREAT POEMS

The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto, the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here is action untied from strings, necessarily blind to particulars and details, magnificently moving in masses. Here is the hospitality which for ever indicates heroes. Here the performance, disdaining the trivial, unapproach'd in the tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings, and the push of its perspective, spreads with crampless and flowing breadth, and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground, or the orchards drop apples, or the bays contain fish, or men beget children upon women.

Other states indicate themselves in their deputies—but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or

legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors, or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors—but always most in the common people, south, north, west, east, in all its States, through all its mighty amplitude. The largeness of the nation, however, were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. Not swarming states, nor streets and steamships, nor prosperous business, nor farms, nor capital, nor learning, may suffice for the ideal of man—nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. A live nation can always cut a deep mark, and can have the best authority the cheapest—namely, from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states, and of present action and grandeur, and of the subjects of poets. (As if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records! As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery, and what has transpired in North and South America, were less than the small theatre of the antique, or the aimless sleep-walking of the middle ages!) The pride of the United States leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities, and all returns of commerce and agriculture, and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory, to enjoy the sight and realization of full-sized men, or one full-sized man unconquerable and simple.

The American poets are to enclose old and new, for America is the race of races. The expression of the American poet is to be transcendent and new. It is to be indirect, and not direct or descriptive or epic. Its quality goes through these to much more. Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted, and their eras and characters be illustrated, and that finish the verse. Not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative, and has vista. Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or obedience or legislation, the great poet never stagnates. Obedience does not master him, he masters it. High up out of reach he stands, turning a concentrated light—he turns the pivot with his finger—he baffles the swiftest runners as he stands, and easily overtakes and envelopes them. The time straying toward infidelity and con-

fections and persiflage he withholds by steady faith. Faith is the antiseptic of the soul—it pervades the common people and preserves them—they never give up believing and expecting and trusting. There is that indescribable freshness and unconsciousness about an illiterate person, that humbles and mocks the power of the noblest expressive genius. The poet sees for a certainty how one not a great artist may be just as sacred and perfect as the greatest artist.

The power to destroy or remould is freely used by the greatest poet, but seldom the power of attack. What is past is past. If he does not expose superior models, and prove himself by every step he takes, he is not what is wanted. The presence of the great poet conquers—not parleying, or struggling, or any prepared attempts. Now he has passed that way, see after him! There is not left any vestige of despair, or misanthropy, or cunning, or exclusiveness, or the ignominy of a nativity or color, or delusion of hell or the necessity of hell—and no man thenceforward shall be degraded for ignorance or weakness or sin.

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity—nothing can make up for excess, or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art. If you have look'd on him who has achiev'd it you have look'd on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the gray gull over the bay, or the mettlesome action of the blood horse, or the tall leaning of sunflowers on their stalk, or the appearance of the sun journeying through heaven, or the appearance of the moon afterward, with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. The great poet has less a mark'd style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome,

I will not have in my writing any elegance, or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe, I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.

The old red blood and stainless gentility of great poets will be proved by their unconstraint. A heroic person walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that suits him not. Of the traits of the brotherhood of first-class writers, savans, musicians, inventors and artists, nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms. In the need of poems, philosophy, politics, mechanism, science, behavior, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand opera, shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest for ever and ever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself, and makes one.

The messages of great poems to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, only then can you understand us. We are no better than you, what we inclose you inclose, what we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumber'd Supremes, and that one does not countervail another any more than one eyesight countervails another—and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them. What do you think is the grandeur of storms and dismemberments, and the deadliest battles and wrecks, and the wildest fury of the elements, and the power of the sea, and the motion of Nature, and the throes of human desires, and dignity and hate and love? It is that something in the soul which says, Rage on, whirl on, I tread master here and everywhere—Master of the spasms of the sky and the shatter of the sea, Master of nature and passion and death, and of all terror and all pain.

The American bards shall be mark'd for generosity and affection, and for encouraging competitors. They shall be Kosmos,

without monopoly or secrecy, glad to pass anything to any one—hungry for equals night and day. They shall not be careful of riches and privilege—they shall be riches and privilege—they shall perceive who the most affluent man is. The most affluent man is he that confronts all the shows he sees by equivalents out of the stronger wealth of himself. The American bard shall delineate no class of persons, nor one or two out of the strata of interests, nor love most nor truth most, nor the soul most, nor the body most—and not be for the Eastern States more than the Western, or the Northern States more than the Southern.

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet, but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there—there the arms that lifted him first, and braced him best—there he returns after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler—the anatomist, chemist, astronomer, geologist, phrenologist, spiritualist, mathematician, historian, and lexicographer, are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets, and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is utter'd, they sent the seed of the conception of it—of them and by them stand the visible proofs of souls. If there shall be love and content between the father and the son, and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of the greatness of the father, there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of poems are henceforth the tuft and final applause of science.

Great is the faith of the flush of knowledge, and of the investigation of the depths of qualities and things. Cleaving and circling here swells the soul of the poet, yet is president of itself always. The depths are fathomless, and therefore calm. The innocence and nakedness are resumed—they are neither modest nor immodest. The whole theory of the supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it, departs as a dream. What has ever happen'd—what happens, and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws inclose all. They are sufficient for any case and for all cases—none to be hurried or retarded—any special miracle of affairs or persons inadmissible in the vast clear scheme where every motion and every spear of grass, and the frames

and spirits of men and women and all that concerns them, are unspeakably perfect miracles, all referring to all, and each distinct and in its place. It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women.

—From Preface, 1855 edition, *Leaves of Grass*

A PROGRAM OF CULTURE

As to the political section of Democracy, which introduces and breaks ground for further and vaster sections, few probably are the minds, even in these republican States, that fully comprehend the aptness of that phrase, "THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE," which we inherit from the lips of Abraham Lincoln; a formula whose verbal shape is homely wit, but whose scope includes both the totality and all minutiæ of the lesson.

The People! Like our huge earth itself, which, to ordinary scansion, is full of vulgar contradictions and offence, man, viewed in the lump, displeases, and is a constant puzzle and affront to the merely educated classes. The rare, cosmical, artist-mind, lit with the Infinite, alone confronts his manifold and oceanic qualities—but taste, intelligence and culture, (so-called,) have been against the masses, and remain so. There is plenty of glamour about the most damnable crimes and hoggish meannesses, special and general, of the feudal and dynastic world over there, with its *personnel* of lords and queens and courts, so well-dress'd and so handsome. But the People are ungrammatical, untidy, and their sins gaunt and ill-bred.

Literature, strictly consider'd, has never recognized the People, and, whatever may be said, does not to-day. Speaking generally, the tendencies of literature, as hitherto pursued, have been to make mostly critical and querulous men. It seems as if, so far, there were some natural repugnance between a literary and professional life, and the rude rank spirit of the democracies. There is, in later literature, a treatment of benevolence, a charity business, rife enough it is true; but I know nothing more rare, even

in this country, than a fit scientific estimate and reverent appreciation of the People—of their measureless wealth of latent power and capacity, their vast, artistic contrasts of lights and shades—with, in America, their entire reliability in emergencies, and a certain breadth of historic grandeur, of peace or war, far surpassing all the vaunted samples of book-heroes, or any *haut ton* coteries, in all the records of the world.

We find ourselves abruptly in close quarters with the enemy. This word Culture, or what it has come to represent, involves, by contrast, our whole theme, and has been, indeed, the spur, urging us to engagement. Certain questions arise. As now taught, accepted and carried out, are not the processes of culture rapidly creating a class of supercilious infidels, who believe in nothing? Shall a man lose himself in countless masses of adjustments, and be so shaped with reference to this, that, and the other, that the simply good and healthy and brave parts of him are reduced and clipp'd away, like the bordering of box in a garden? You can cultivate corn and roses and orchards—but who shall cultivate the mountain peaks, the ocean, and the tumbling gorgeousness of the clouds? Lastly—is the readily-given reply that culture only seeks to help, systematize, and put in attitude, the elements of fertility and power, a conclusive reply?

I do not so much object to the name, or word, but I should certainly insist, for the purposes of these States, on a radical change of category, in the distribution of precedence. I should demand a programme of culture, drawn out, not for a single class alone, or for the parlors or lecture-rooms, but with an eye to practical life, the west, the working-men, the facts of farms and jack-planes and engineers, and of the broad range of the women also of the middle and working strata, and with reference to the perfect equality of women, and of a grand and powerful motherhood. I should demand of this programme or theory a scope generous enough to include the widest human area. It must have for its spinal meaning the formation of a typical personality of character, eligible to the uses of the high average of men—and *not* restricted by conditions ineligible to the masses. The best culture will always be that of the manly and courageous

instincts, and loving perceptions, and of self-respect—aiming to form, over this continent, an idiocrasy of universalism, which, true child of America, will bring joy to its mother, returning to her in her own spirit, recruiting myriads of offspring, able, natural, perceptive, tolerant, devout believers in her, America, and with some definite instinct why and for what she has arisen, most vast, most formidable of historic births, and is, now and here, with wonderful step, journeying through Time.

What is the reason our time, our lands, that we see no fresh local courage, sanity, of our own—the Mississippi, stalwart Western men, real mental and physical facts, Southerners, etc., in the body of our literature? especially the poetic part of it. But always, instead, a parcel of dandies and ennuyees, dapper little gentlemen from abroad, who flood us with their thin sentiment of parlors, parasols, piano-songs, tinkling rhymes, the five-hundredth importation—or whimpering and crying about something, chasing one aborted conceit after another, and forever occupied in dyspeptic amours with dyspeptic women. While, current and novel, the grandest events and revolutions, and stormiest passions of history, are crossing to-day with unparallel'd rapidity and magnificence over the stages of our own and all the continents, offering new materials, opening new vistas, with largest needs, inviting the daring launching forth of conceptions in literature, inspired by them, soaring in highest regions, serving art in its highest, (which is only the other name for serving God, and serving humanity,) where is the man of letters, where is the book, with any nobler aim than to follow in the old track, repeat what has been said before—and, as its utmost triumph, sell well, and be erudite or elegant?

Of what is called the drama, or dramatic presentation in the United States, as now put forth at the theatres, I should say it deserves to be treated with the same gravity, and on a par with the questions of ornamental confectionery at public dinners, or the arrangement of curtains and hangings in a ball-room—nor more, nor less. Of the other, I will not insult the reader's intelligence, (once really entering into the atmosphere of these Vistas,)

by supposing it necessary to show, in detail, why the copious dribble, either of our little or well-known rhymesters, does not fulfil, in any respect, the needs and august occasions of this land. America demands a poetry that is bold, modern, and all-surrounding and kosmical, as she is herself. It must in no respect ignore science or the modern, but inspire itself with science and the modern. It must bend its vision toward the future, more than the past. Like America, it must extricate itself from even the greatest models of the past, and, while courteous to them, must have entire faith in itself, and the products of its own democratic spirit only. Like her, it must place in the van, and hold up at all hazards, the banner of the divine pride of man in himself, (the radical foundation of the new religion). Long enough have the People been listening to poems in which common humanity, deferential, bends low, humiliated, acknowledging superiors. But America listens to no such poems. Erect, inflated, and fully self-esteeming be the chant; and then America will listen with pleased ears.

—From *Democratic Vistas*

"The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem."

2. I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

THOU MOTHER WITH THY EQUAL BROOD

Thou Mother with thy equal brood,
Thou varied chain of different States, yet one identity only,
A special song before I go I'd sing o'er all the rest,
For thee, the future.

I'd sow a seed for thee of endless Nationality,
I'd fashion thy ensemble including body and soul,
I'd show away ahead thy real Union, and how it may be accomplish'd.

The paths to the house I seek to make,
But leave to those to come the house itself.

Belief I sing, and preparation;
As Life and Nature are not great with reference to the present only,
But greater still from what is yet to come,
Out of that formula for thee I sing.

As a strong bird on pinions free,
Joyous, the amplest spaces heavenward cleaving,
Such be the thought I'd bring of thee America,
Such be the recitative I'd bring for thee.

The conceits of the poets of other lands I'd bring thee not,
Nor the compliments that have served their turn so long,
Nor rhyme, nor the classics, nor perfume of foreign court or indoor library;

But an odor I'd bring as from forests of pine in Maine, or breath of an Illinois prairie,
With open airs of Virginia or Georgia or Tennessee, or from Texas uplands, or Florida's glades,
Or the Saguenay's black stream, or the wide blue spread of Huron,
With presentment of Yellowstone's scenes, or Yosemite,
And murmuring under, pervading all, I'd bring the rustling sea-sound,
That endlessly sounds from the two Great Seas of the world.

And for thy subtler sense subtler refrains dread Mother,
Preludes of intellect tallying these and thee, mind-formulas fitted for thee, real and sane and large as these and thee,
Thou! mounting higher, diving deeper than we knew, thou transcendental Union!
By thee fact to be justified, blended with thought,
Thought of man justified, blended with God,
Through thy idea, lo, the immortal reality!
Through thy reality, lo, the immortal idea!

Brain of the New World, what a task is thine,
To formulate the Modern—out of the peerless grandeur of the modern,
Out of thyself, comprising science, to recast poems, churches, art,
(Recast, may-be discard them, end them—may-be their work is done, who knows?)
By vision, hand, conception, on the background of the mighty past, the dead,
To limn with absolute faith the mighty living present.

And yet thou living present brain, heir of the dead, the Old World brain,
Thou that lay folded like an unborn babe within its folds so long,
Thou carefully prepared by it so long—haply thou but unfoldest it, only maturest it,
It to eventuate in thee—the essence of the by-gone time contain'd in thee,
Its poems, churches, arts, unwitting to themselves, destined with reference to thee;
Thou but the apples, long, long, long a-growing,
The fruit of all the Old ripening to-day in thee.

Sail, sail thy best, ship of Democracy,
Of value is thy freight, 'tis not the Present only,
The Past is also stored in thee,
Thou holdest not the venture of thyself alone, not of the Western continent alone,
Earth's *résumé* entire floats on thy keel O ship, is steadied by thy spars,
With thee Time voyages in trust, the antecedent nations sink or swim with thee,
With all their ancient struggles, martyrs, heroes, epics, wars, thou bear'st the other continents,
Theirs, theirs as much as thine, the destination-port triumphant;
Steer then with good strong hand and wary eye O helmsman, thou carriest great companions,
Venerable priestly Asia sails this day with thee,
And royal feudal Europe sails with thee.

Beautiful world of new superber birth that rises to my eyes,
Like a limitless golden cloud filling the western sky,
Emblem of general maternity lifted above all,
Sacred shape of the bearer of daughters and sons,
Out of thy teeming womb thy giant babes in ceaseless procession issuing,
Acceding from such gestation, taking and giving continual strength and life,
World of the real—world of the twain in one,
World of the soul, born by the world of the real alone, led to identity, body, by it alone,
Yet in beginning only, incalculable masses of composite precious materials,
By history's cycles forwarded, by every nation, language, hither sent,
Ready, collected here, a freer, vast, electric world, to be constructed here,
(The true New World, the world of orbic science, morals, literatures to come,)
Thou wonder world yet undefined, unform'd, neither do I define thee,
How can I pierce the impenetrable blank of the future?
I feel thy ominous greatness evil as well as good,
I watch thee advancing, absorbing the present, transcending the past,
I see thy light lighting, and thy shadow shadowing, as if the entire globe,
But I do not undertake to define thee, hardly to comprehend thee,
I but thee name, thee prophesy, as now,
I merely thee ejaculate!

Thee in thy future,
Thee in thy only permanent life, career, thy own unloosen'd mind, thy soaring spirit,
Thee as another equally needed sun, radiant, ablaze, swift-moving, fructifying all,
Thee risen in potent cheerfulness and joy, in endless great hilarity,

Scattering for good the cloud that hung so long, that weigh'd so long upon the mind of man,
The doubt, suspicion, dread, of gradual, certain decadence of man;
Thee in thy larger, saner brood of female, male—thee in thy athletes, moral, spiritual, South, North, West, East,
(To thy immortal breasts, Mother of All, thy every daughter, son, endear'd alike, forever equal,)
Thee in thy own musicians, singers, artists, unborn yet, but certain,
Thee in thy moral wealth and civilization, (until which thy proudest material civilization must remain in vain,)
Thee in thy all-supplying, all-enclosing worship—thee in no single bible, saviour, merely,
Thy saviours countless, latent within thyself, thy bibles incessant within thyself, equal to any, divine as any,
(Thy soaring course thee formulating, not in thy two great wars, nor in thy century's visible growth,
But far more in these leaves and chants, thy chants, great Mother!)
Thee in an education grown of thee, in teachers, studies, students, born of thee,
Thee in thy democratic fêtes en-masse, thy high original festivals, operas, lecturers, preachers,
Thee in thy ultimata, (the preparations only now completed, the edifice on sure foundations tied,)
Thee in thy pinnacles, intellect, thought, thy topmost rational joys, thy love and godlike aspiration,
In thy resplendent coming literati, thy full-lung'd orators, thy sacerdotal bards, kosmic savans,
These! these in thee, (certain to come,) to-day I prophesy.

Land tolerating all, accepting all, not for the good alone, all good for thee,
Land in the realms of God to be a realm unto thyself,
Under the rule of God to be a rule unto thyself.
(Lo, where arise three peerless stars,
To be thy natal stars my country, Ensemble, Evolution, Freedom,
Set in the sky of Law.)

Land of unprecedented faith, God's faith,
Thy soil, thy very subsoil, all upheav'd,
The general inner earth so long so sedulously draped over, now hence for what it is boldly laid bare,
Open'd by thee to heaven's light for benefit or bale.

Not for success alone,
Not to fair-sail unintermitted always,
The storm shall dash thy face, the murk of war and worse than war shall cover thee all over,
(Wert capable of war, its tug and trials? be capable of peace, its trials,
For the tug and mortal strain of nations come at last in prosperous peace, not war;)
In many a smiling mask death shall approach beguiling thee, thou in disease shalt swelter,
The livid cancer spread its hideous claws, clinging upon thy breasts, seeking to strike thee deep within,
Consumption of the worst, moral consumption, shall rouge thy face with hectic,
But thou shalt face thy fortunes, thy diseases, and surmount them all,
Whatever they are to-day and whatever through time they may be,
They each and all shall lift and pass away and cease from thee,
While thou, Time's spirals rounding, out of thyself, thyself still extricating, fusing,
Equable, natural, mystical Union thou, (the mortal with immortal blent,)
Shalt soar toward the fulfilment of the future, the spirit of the body and the mind,
The soul, its destinies.

The soul, its destinies, the real real,
(Purport of all these apparitions of the real;)
In thee America, the soul, its destinies,
Thou globe of globes! thou wonder nebulous!

By many a throe of heat and cold convuls'd, (by these thyself solidifying,)
Thou mental, moral orb—thou New, indeed new, Spiritual World!
The Present holds thee not—for such vast growth as thine,
For such unparallel'd flight as thine, such brood as thine,
The FUTURE only holds thee and can hold thee.

PIONEERS! O PIONEERS!

Come my tan-faced children,
Follow well in order, get your weapons ready,
Have you your pistols? have you your sharp-edged axes?
Pioneers! O pioneers!

For we cannot tarry here,
We must march my darlings, we must bear the brunt of danger,
We the youthful sinewy races, all the rest on us depend,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you youths, Western youths,
So impatient, full of action, full of manly pride and friendship,
Plain I see you Western youths, see you tramping with the foremost,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Have the elder races halted?
Do they droop and end their lesson, wearied over there beyond the seas?
We take up the task eternal, and the burden and the lesson,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the past we leave behind,
We debouch upon a newer mightier world, varied world,
Fresh and strong the world we seize, world of labor and the march,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We detachments steady throwing,
Down the edges, through the passes, up the mountains steep,
Conquering, holding, daring, venturing as we go the unknown ways,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

We primeval forests felling,
We the rivers stemming, vexing we and piercing deep the mines within,
We the surface broad surveying, we the virgin soil upheaving,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Colorado men are we,
From the peaks gigantic, from the great sierras and the high plateaus,
From the mine and from the gully, from the hunting trail we come,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

From Nebraska, from Arkansas,
Central inland race are we, from Missouri, with the continental blood intervein'd,
All the hands of comrades clasping, all the Southern, all the Northern,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O resistless restless race!
O beloved race in all! O my breast aches with tender love for all!
O I mourn and yet exult, I am rapt with love for all,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Raise the mighty mother mistress,
Waving high the delicate mistress, over all the starry mistress, (bend your heads all,)
Raise the fang'd and warlike mistress, stern, impassive, weapon'd mistress,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

See my children, resolute children,
By those swarms upon our rear we must never yield or falter,
Ages back in ghostly millions frowning there behind us urging,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

On and on the compact ranks,
With accessions ever waiting, with the places of the dead quickly fill'd,
Through the battle, through defeat, moving yet and never stopping,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O to die advancing on!
Are there some of us to droop and die? has the hour come?
Then upon the march we fittest die, soon and sure the gap is fill'd,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the pulses of the world,
Falling in they beat for us, with the Western movement beat,
Holding single or together, steady moving to the front, all for us,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Life's involv'd and varied pageants,
All the forms and shows, all the workmen at their work,
All the seamen and the landsmen, all the masters with their slaves,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

All the hapless silent lovers,
All the prisoners in the prisons, all the righteous and the wicked,
All the joyous, all the sorrowing, all the living, all the dying,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

I too with my soul and body,
We, a curious trio, picking, wandering on our way,
Through these shores amid the shadows, with the apparitions pressing,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Lo, the darting bowling orb!
Lo, the brother orbs around, all the clustering suns and planets,
All the dazzling days, all the mystic nights with dreams,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

These are of us, they are with us,
All for primal needed work, while the followers there in embryo wait behind,
We to-day's procession heading, we the route for travel clearing,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

O you daughters of the West!
O you young and elder daughters! O you mothers and you wives!
Never must you be divided, in our ranks you move united,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Minstrels latent on the prairies!
(Shrouded bards of other lands, you may rest, you have done your work,)
Soon I hear you coming warbling, soon you rise and tramp amid us,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Not for delectations sweet,
Not the cushion and the slipper, not the peaceful and the studious,
Not the riches safe and palling, not for us the tame enjoyment,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Do the feasters gluttonous feast?
Do the corpulent sleepers sleep? have they lock'd and bolted doors?
Still be ours the diet hard, and the blanket on the ground,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Has the night descended?
Was the road of late so toilsome? did we stop discouraged nodding on our way?
Yet a passing hour I yield you in your tracks to pause oblivious,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

Till with sound of trumpet,
Far, far off the daybreak call—hark! how loud and clear I hear it wind,
Swift! to the head of the army!—swift! spring to your places,
Pioneers! O pioneers!

STARTING FROM PAUMANOK

Starting from fish-shape Paumanok where I was born,
Well-begotten, and rais'd by a perfect mother,
After roaming many lands, lover of populous pavements,
Dweller in Mannahatta my city, or on southern savannas,
Or a soldier camp'd or carrying my knapsack and gun, or a miner in California,
Or rude in my home in Dakota's woods, my diet meat, my drink from the spring,
Or withdrawn to muse and meditate in some deep recess,
Far from the clank of crowds intervals passing rapt and happy,
Aware of the fresh free giver the flowing Missouri, aware of mighty Niagara,
Aware of the buffalo herds grazing the plains, the hirsute and strong-breasted bull,
Of earth, rocks, Fifth-month flowers experienced, stars, rain, snow, my amaze,
Having studied the mocking-bird's tones and the flight of the mountain-hawk,
And heard at dawn the unrivall'd one, the hermit thrush from the swamp-cedars,
Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a New World.

Victory, union, faith, identity, time,
The indissoluble compacts, riches, mystery,
Eternal progress, the kosmos, and the modern reports.

This then is life,
Here is what has come to the surface after so many throes and convulsions.
How curious! how real!
Underfoot the divine soil, overhead the sun.

See revolving the globe,
The ancestor-continents away group'd together,
The present and future continents north and south, with the isthmus between.

See, vast trackless spaces,
As in a dream they change, they swiftly fill,
Countless masses debouch upon them,
They are now cover'd with the foremost people, arts, institutions, known.

See, projected through time,
For me an audience interminable.

With firm and regular step they wend, they never stop,
Successions of men, Americanos, a hundred millions,
One generation playing its part and passing on,
Another generation playing its part and passing on in its turn,
With faces turn'd sideways or backward towards me to listen,
With eyes retrospective towards me.

Americanos! conquerors! marches humanitarian!
Foremost! century marches! Libertad! masses!
For you a programme of chants.

Chants of the prairies,
Chants of the long-running Mississippi, and down to the Mexican sea,
Chants of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota,
Chants going forth from the centre from Kansas, and thence equidistant,
Shooting in pulses of fire ceaseless to vivify all.

Take my leaves America, take them South and take them North,
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are your own offspring,
Surround them East and West, for they would surround you,
And you precedents, connect lovingly with them, for they connect lovingly with you....

Whoever you are, to you endless announcements!

Daughter of the lands did you wait for your poet?
Did you wait for one with a flowing mouth and indicative hand?

Toward the male of the States, and toward the female of the States,
Exulting words, words to Democracy's lands.

Interlink'd, food-yielding lands!
Land of coal and iron! land of gold! land of cotton, sugar, rice!
Land of wheat, beef, pork! land of wool and hemp! land of the apple and the grape!
Land of the pastoral plains, the grass-fields of the world! land of those sweet-air'd interminable plateaus!
Land of the herd, the garden, the healthy house of adobie!
Lands where the north-west Columbia winds, and where the south-west Colorado winds!
Land of the eastern Chesapeake! land of the Delaware!
Land of Ontario, Erie, Huron, Michigan!
Land of the Old Thirteen! Massachusetts land! land of Vermont and Connecticut!
Land of the ocean shores! land of sierras and peaks!
Land of boatmen and sailors! fishermen's land!
Inextricable lands! the clutch'd together! the passionate ones!
The side by side! the elder and younger brothers! the bony-limb'd!
The great women's land! the feminine! the experienced sisters and the inexperienced sisters!
Far breath'd land! Arctic braced! Mexican breez'd! the diverse! the compact!
The Pennsylvanian! the Virginian! the double Carolinian!
O all and each well-loved by me! my intrepid nations! O I at any rate include you all with perfect love!
I cannot be discharged from you! not from one any sooner than another!
O death! O for all that, I am yet of you unseen this hour with irrepressible love,

Walking New England, a friend, a traveler,
Splashing my bare feet in the edge of the summer ripples on Paumanok's sands,
Crossing the prairies, dwelling again in Chicago, dwelling in every town,
Observing shows, births, improvements, structures, arts,
Listening to orators and oratresses in public halls,
Of and through the States as during life, each man and woman my neighbor,
The Louisianian, the Georgian, as near to me, and I as near to him and her,
The Mississippian and the Arkansian yet with me, and I yet with any of them,
Yet upon the plains west of the spinal river, yet in my house of adobie,
Yet returning eastward, yet in the Seaside State or in Maryland,
Yet Kanadian cheerily braving the winter, the snow and ice welcome to me,
Yet a true son either of Maine or of the Granite State, or the Narragansett Bay State, or the Empire State,
Yet sailing to other shores to annex the same, yet welcoming every new brother,
Hereby applying these leaves to the new ones from the hour they unite with the old ones,
Coming among the new ones myself to be their companion and equal, coming personally to you now,
Enjoining you to acts, characters, spectacles, with me.

With me with firm holding, yet haste, haste on.

For your life adhere to me,
(I may have to be persuaded many times before I consent to give myself really to you, but what of that?
Must not Nature be persuaded many times?)

No dainty dolce affettuoso I,
Bearded, sun-burnt, gray-neck'd, forbidding, I have arrived,
To be wrestled with as I pass for the solid prizes of the universe,
For such I afford whoever can persevere to win them.

On my way a moment I pause,
Here for you! and here for America!
Still the present I raise aloft, still the future of the States I harbinge glad and sublime,
And for the past I pronounce what the air holds of the red aborigines.

The red aborigines,
Leaving natural breaths, sounds of rain and winds, calls as of birds and animals in the woods, syllabled to us for names,
Okonee, Koosa, Ottawa, Monongahela, Sauk, Natchez, Chattahoochee, Kaqueta, Oronoco,
Wabash, Miami, Saginaw, Chippewa, Oshkosh, Walla-Walla,
Leaving such to the States they melt, they depart, charging the water and the land with names.

Expanding and swift, henceforth,
Elements, breeds, adjustments, turbulent, quick and audacious,
A world primal again, vistas of glory incessant and branching,
A new race dominating previous ones and grander far, with new contests,
New politics, new literatures and religions, new inventions and arts.

These, my voice announcing—I will sleep no more but arise,
You oceans that have been calm within me! how I feel you, fathomless, stirring, preparing unprecedented waves and storms.

See, steamers steaming through my poems,
See, in my poems immigrants continually coming and landing,
See, in arriere, the wigwam, the trail, the hunter's hut, the flatboat, the maize-leaf, the claim, the rude fence, and the backwoods village,
See, on the one side the Western Sea and on the other the Eastern Sea, how they advance and retreat upon my poems as upon their own shores,
See, pastures and forests in my poems—see, animals wild and

tame—see, beyond the Kaw, countless herds of buffalo feeding on short curly grass,
See, in my poems, cities, solid, vast, inland, with paved streets, with iron and stone edifices, ceaseless vehicles, and commerce,
See, the many-cylinder'd steam printing-press—see, the electric telegraph stretching across the continent,
See, through Atlantica's depths pulses American Europe reaching, pulses of Europe duly return'd,
See, the strong and quick locomotive as it departs, panting, blowing the steam-whistle,
See, ploughmen, ploughing farms—see, miners digging mines—see, the numberless factories,
See, mechanics busy at their benches with tools—see from among them superior judges, philosophs, Presidents, emerge, drest in working dresses,
See, lounging through the shops and fields of the States, me well-belov'd, close-held by day and night,
Hear the loud echoes of my songs there—read the hints come at last....

FOR YOU O DEMOCRACY

Come, I will make the continent indissoluble,
I will make the most splendid race the sun ever shone upon,
I will make divine magnetic lands,
With the love of comrades,
With the life-long love of comrades.

I will plant companionship thick as trees along all the rivers of America, and along the shores of the great lakes, and all over the prairies,
I will make inseparable cities with their arms about each other's necks,
By the love of comrades,
By the manly love of comrades.
For you these from me, O Democracy, to serve you ma femme!
For you, for you I am trilling these songs.

"I sing the body electric,
The armies of those I love engirth me and I engirth them."

3. *The Body Electric*

FROM PENT-UP ACHING RIVERS

From pent-up aching rivers,
From that of myself without which I were nothing,
From what I am determin'd to make illustrious, even if I stand sole among men,
From my own voice resonant, singing the phallus,
Singing the song of procreation,
Singing the need of superb children and therein superb grown people,
Singing the muscular urge and the blending,
Singing the bedfellow's song, (O resistless yearning!
O for any and each the body correlative attracting!
O for you whoever you are your correlative body! O it, more than all else, you delighting!)
From the hungry gnaw that eats me night and day,
From native moments, from bashful pains, singing them,
Seeking something yet unfound though I have diligently sought it many a long year,
Singing the true song of the soul fitful at random,
Renascent with grossest Nature or among animals,
Of that, of them and what goes with them my poems informing,
Of the smell of apples and lemons, of the pairing of birds,
Of the wet of woods, of the lapping of waves,
Of the mad pushes of waves upon the land, I them chanting,
The overture lightly sounding, the strain anticipating,
The welcome nearness, the sight of the perfect body,
The swimmer swimming naked in the bath, or motionless on his back lying and floating,

The female form approaching, I pensive, love-flesh tremulous aching,
The divine list for myself or you or for any one making,
The face, the limbs, the index from head to foot, and what it arouses,
The mystic deliria, the madness amorous, the utter abandonment.
(Hark close and still what I now whisper to you,
I love you, O you entirely possess me,
O that you and I escape from the rest and go utterly off, free and lawless,
Two hawks in the air, two fishes swimming in the sea not more lawless than we;)
The furious storm through me careering, I passionately trembling,
The oath of the inseparableness of two together, of the woman that loves me and whom I love more than my life, that oath swearing,
(O I willingly stake all for you,
O let me be lost if it must be so!
O you and I! what is it to us what the rest do or think?
What is all else to us? only that we enjoy each other and exhaust each other if it must be so;)
From the master, the pilot I yield the vessel to,
The general commanding me, commanding all, from him permission taking,
From time the programme hastening, (I have loiter'd too long as it is,)
From sex, from the warp and from the woof,
From privacy, from frequent repinings alone,
From plenty of persons near and yet the right person not near,
From the soft sliding of hands over me and thrusting of fingers through my hair and beard,
From the long sustain'd kiss upon the mouth or bosom,
From the close pressure that makes me or any man drunk, fainting with excess,
From what the divine husband knows, from the work of fatherhood,

From exultation, victory and relief, from the bedfellow's embrace in the night,
From the act-poems of eyes, hands, hips and bosoms,
From the cling of the trembling arm,
From the bending curve and the clinch,
From side by side the pliant coverlet off-throwing,
From the one so unwilling to have me leave, and me just as unwilling to leave,
(Yet a moment O tender waiter, and I return,)
From the hour of shining stars and dropping dews,
From the night a moment I emerging flitting out,
Celebrate you act divine and you children prepared for,
And you stalwart loins.

ONCE I PASS'D THROUGH A POPULOUS CITY

Once I pass'd through a populous city imprinting my brain for future use with its shows, architecture, customs, traditions,
Yet now of all that city I remember only a woman I casually met there who detain'd me for love of me,
Day by day and night by night we were together—all else has long been forgotten by me,
I remember I say only that woman who passionately clung to me,
Again we wander, we love, we separate again,
Again she holds me by the hand, I must not go,
I see her close beside me with silent lips sad and tremulous.

ONE HOUR TO MADNESS AND JOY

One hour to madness and joy! O furious! O confine me not!
(What is this that frees me so in storms?
What do my shouts amid lightnings and raging winds mean?)

O to drink the mystic deliria deeper than any other man!
O savage and tender achings! (I bequeath them to you my children,
I tell them to you, for reasons, O bridegroom and bride.)

O to be yielded to you whoever you are, and you to be yielded to me in defiance of the world!
O to return to Paradise! O bashful and feminine!
O to draw you to me, to plant on you for the first time the lips of a determin'd man.

O the puzzle, the thrice-tied knot, the deep and dark pool, all untried and illumin'd!
O to speed where there is space enough and air enough at last!
To be absolv'd from previous ties and conventions, I from mine and you from yours!
To find a new unthought-of nonchalance with the best of Nature!

To have the gag remov'd from one's mouth!
To have the feeling to-day or any day I am sufficient as I am.
O something unprov'd! something in a trance!
To escape utterly from others' anchors and holds!
To drive free! to love free! to dash reckless and dangerous!
To court destruction with taunts, with invitations!
To ascend, to leap to the heavens of the love indicated to me!
To rise thither with my inebriate soul!
To be lost if it must be so!
To feed the remainder of life with one hour of fulness and freedom!
With one brief hour of madness and joy.

SONG OF THE OPEN ROAD

Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,
Strong and content I travel the open road.

The earth, that is sufficient,
I do not want the constellations any nearer,
I know they are very well where they are,
I know they suffice for those who belong to them.

(Still here I carry my old delicious burdens,
I carry them, men and women, I carry them with me wherever I go,
I swear it is impossible for me to get rid of them,
I am fill'd with them, and I will fill them in return.) ...

Allons! we must not stop here,
However sweet these laid-up stores, however convenient this dwelling we cannot remain here,
However shelter'd this port and however calm these waters we must not anchor here,
However welcome the hospitality that surrounds us we are permitted to receive it but a little while.

Allons! the inducements shall be greater,
We will sail pathless and wild seas,
We will go where winds blow, waves dash, and the Yankee clipper speeds by under full sail.

Allons! with power, liberty, the earth, the elements,
Health, defiance, gayety, self-esteem, curiosity;
Allons! from all formules!
From your formules, O bat-eyed and materialistic priests.

The stale cadaver blocks up the passage—the burial waits no longer.

Allons! yet take warning!
He traveling with me needs the best blood, thews, endurance,
None may come to the trial till he or she bring courage and health,
Come not here if you have already spent the best of yourself,
Only those may come who come in sweet and determin'd bodies,
No diseas'd person, no rum-drinker or venereal taint is permitted here.
(I and mine do not convince by arguments, similes, rhymes,
We convince by our presence.)

Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes,
These are the days that must happen to you:
You shall not heap up what is call'd riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve,
You but arrive at the city to which you were destin'd, you hardly settle yourself to satisfaction before you are call'd by an irresistible call to depart,
You shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings of those who remain behind you,
What beckonings of love you receive you shall only answer with passionate kisses of parting,
You shall not allow the hold of those who spread their reach'd hands toward you.

Allons! after the great Companions, and to belong to them!
They too are on the road—they are the swift and majestic men—they are the greatest women,
Enjoyers of calms of seas and storms of seas,
Sailors of many a ship, walkers of many a mile of land,
Habitués of many distant countries, habitués of far-distant dwellings,
Trusters of men and women, observers of cities, solitary toilers,
Pausers and contemplators of tufts, blossoms, shells of the shore,
Dancers at wedding-dances, kissers of brides, tender helpers of children, bearers of children,
Soldiers of revolts, standers by gaping graves, lowerers-down of coffins,
Journeyers over consecutive seasons, over the years, the curious years each emerging from that which preceded it,
Journeyers as with companions, namely their own diverse phases,
Forth-steppers from the latent unrealized baby-days,
Journeyers gayly with their own youth, journeyers with their bearded and well-grain'd manhood,
Journeyers with their womanhood, ample, unsurpass'd, content,
Journeyers with their own sublime old age of manhood or womanhood,

Old age, calm, expanded, broad with the haughty breadth of the universe,
Old age, flowing free with the delicious near-by freedom of death.

Allons! to that which is endless as it was beginningless,
To undergo much, tramps of days, rests of nights,
To merge all in the travel they tend to, and the days and nights they tend to,
Again to merge them in the start of superior journeys,
To see nothing anywhere but what you may reach it and pass it,
To conceive no time, however distant, but what you may reach it and pass it,
To look up or down no road but it stretches and waits for you, however long but it stretches and waits for you,
To see no being, not God's or any, but you also go thither,
To see no possession but you may possess it, enjoying all without labor or purchase, abstracting the feast yet not abstracting one particle of it,
To take the best of the farmer's farm and the rich man's elegant villa, and the chaste blessings of the well-married couple, and the fruits of orchards and flowers of gardens,
To take to your use out of the compact cities as you pass through,
To carry buildings and streets with you afterward wherever you go,
To gather the minds of men out of their brains as you encounter them, to gather the love out of their hearts,
To take your lovers on the road with you, for all that you leave them behind you,
To know the universe itself as a road, as many roads, as roads for traveling souls.

All parts away for the progress of souls,
All religion, all solid things, arts, governments—all that was or is apparent upon this globe or any globe, falls into niches and corners before the procession of souls along the grand roads of the universe.

Of the progress of the souls of men and women along the grand roads of the universe, all other progress is the needed emblem and sustenance.

Forever alive, forever forward,
Stately, solemn, sad, withdrawn, baffled, mad, turbulent, feeble, dissatisfied,
Desperate, proud, fond, sick, accepted by men, rejected by men,
They go! they go! I know that they go, but I know not where they go,
But I know that they go toward the best—toward something great.

Whoever you are, come forth! or man or woman come forth!
You must not stay sleeping and dallying there in the house, though you built it, or though it has been built for you.

Out of the dark confinement! out from behind the screen!
It is useless to protest, I know all and expose it.

Behold through you as bad as the rest,
Through the laughter, dancing, dining, supping, of people,
Inside of dresses and ornaments, inside of those wash'd and trimm'd faces,
Behold a secret silent loathing and despair.

No husband, no wife, no friend, trusted to hear the confession,
Another self, a duplicate of every one, skulking and hiding it goes,
Formless and wordless through the streets of the cities, polite and bland in the parlors,
In the cars of railroads, in steamboats, in the public assembly,
Home to the houses of men and women, at the table, in the bedroom, everywhere,
Smartly attired, countenance smiling, form upright, death under the breast-bone, hell under the skull-bones,
Under the broadcloth and gloves, under the ribbons and artificial flowers,

Keeping fair with the customs, speaking not a syllable of itself,
Speaking of any thing else but never of itself.

Allons! through struggles and wars!
The goal that was named cannot be countermanded.

Have the past struggles succeeded?
What has succeeded? yourself? your nation? Nature?
Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things that from any fruition of success, no matter what, shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.

My call is the call of battle, I nourish active rebellion,
He going with me must go well arm'd,
He going with me goes often with spare diet, poverty, angry enemies, desertions.

Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe—I have tried it—my own feet have tried it well—be not detain'd!

Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in the court, and the judge expound the law.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

IN PATHS UNTRODDEN

In paths untrodden,
In the growth by margins of pond-waters,
Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
From all the standards hitherto publish'd, from the pleasures, profits, conformities,
Which too long I was offering to feed my soul,
Clear to me now standards not yet publish'd, clear to me that my soul,
That the soul of the man I speak for rejoices in comrades,
Here by myself away from the clank of the world,
Tallying and talk'd to here by tongues aromatic,
No longer abash'd, (for in this secluded spot I can respond as I would not dare elsewhere,)
Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself, yet contains all the rest,
Resolv'd to sing no songs to-day but those of manly attachment,
Projecting them along that substantial life,
Bequeathing hence types of athletic love,
Afternoon this delicious Ninth-month in my forty-first year,
I proceed for all who are or have been young men,
To tell the secret of my nights and days,
To celebrate the need of comrades.

RECORDERS AGES HENCE

Recorders ages hence,
Come, I will take you down underneath this impassive exterior, I will tell you what to say of me,
Publish my name and hang up my picture as that of the tenderest lover,
The friend the lover's portrait, of whom his friend his lover was fondest,
Who was not proud of his songs, but of the measureless ocean of love within him, and freely pour'd it forth,

Who often walk'd lonesome walks thinking of his dear friends, his lovers,
Who pensive away from one he lov'd often lay sleepless and dissatisfied at night,
Who knew too well the sick, sick dread lest the one he lov'd might secretly be indifferent to him,
Whose happiest days were far away through fields, in woods, on hills, he and another wandering hand in hand, they twain apart from other men,
Who oft as he saunter'd the streets curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend, while the arm of his friend rested upon him also.

THE SANITY OF BIRTH

Shall the mention of such topics as I have briefly but plainly and resolutely broach'd in the "Children of Adam" section of *Leaves of Grass* be admitted in poetry and literature? Ought not the innovation to be put down by opinion and criticism? and, if those fail, by the District Attorney? True, I could not construct a poem which declaredly took, as never before, the complete human identity, physical, moral, emotional, and intellectual, (giving precedence and compass in a certain sense to the first,) nor fulfil that *bona fide* candor and entirety of treatment which was a part of my purpose, without comprehending this section also. But I would entrench myself more deeply and widely than that. And while I do not ask any man to indorse my theory, I confess myself anxious that what I sought to write and express, and the ground I built on, shall be at least partially understood, from its own platform. The best way seems to me to confront the question with entire frankness.

There are, generally speaking, two points of view, two conditions of the world's attitude toward these matters; the first, the conventional one of good folks and good print everywhere, repressing any direct statement of them, and making allusions only at second or third hand—(as the Greeks did of death, which, in Hellenic social culture, was not mention'd point-blank, but by

euphemisms). In the civilization of to-day, this condition—without stopping to elaborate the arguments and facts, which are many and varied and perplexing—has led to states of ignorance, repressal, and cover'd over disease and depletion, forming certainly a main factor in the world's woe. A non-scientific, non-esthetic, and eminently non-religious condition, bequeath'd to us from the past, (its origins diverse, one of them the far-back lessons of benevolent and wise men to restrain the prevalent coarseness and animality of the tribal ages—with Puritanism, or perhaps Protestantism itself for another, and still another specified in the latter part of this memorandum)—to it is probably due most of the ill births, inefficient maturity, snickering pruriency, and of that human pathologic evil and morbidity which is, in my opinion, the keel and reason-why of every evil and morbidity. Its scent, as of something sneaking, furtive, mephitic, seems to lingeringly pervade all modern literature, conversation, and manners.

The second point of view, and by far the largest—as the world in working-day dress vastly exceeds the world in parlor toilette—is the one of common life, from the oldest times down, and especially in England, (see the earlier chapters of Taine's *English Literature,* and see Shakspere almost anywhere,) and which our age to-day inherits from riant stock, in the wit, or what passes for wit, of masculine circles, and in erotic stories and talk, to excite, express, and dwell on, that merely sensual voluptuousness which, according to Victor Hugo, is the most universal trait of all ages, all lands. This second condition, however bad, is at any rate like a disease which comes to the surface, and therefore less dangerous than a conceal'd one.

The time seems to me to have arrived, and America to be the place, for a new departure—a third point of view. The same freedom and faith and earnestness which, after centuries of denial, struggle, repression, and martyrdom, the present day brings to the treatment of politics and religion, must work out a plan and standard on this subject, not so much for what is call'd society, as for thoughtfulest men and women, and thoughtfulest literature. The same spirit that marks the physiological author and demonstrator on these topics in his important field, I have thought

necessary to be exemplified, for once, in another certainly not less important field.

In the present memorandum I only venture to indicate that plan and view—decided upon more than twenty years ago, for my own literary action, and formulated tangibly in my printed poems—(as Bacon says an abstract thought or theory is of no moment unless it leads to a deed or work done, exemplifying it in the concrete)—that the sexual passion in itself, while normal and unperverted, is inherently legitimate, creditable, not necessarily an improper theme for poet, as confessedly not for scientist —that, with reference to the whole construction, organism, and intentions of *Leaves of Grass,* anything short of confronting that theme, and making myself clear upon it, as the enclosing basis of everything, (as the sanity of everything was to be the atmosphere of the poems,) I should beg the question in its most momentous aspect, and the superstructure that follow'd, pretensive as it might assume to be, would all rest on a poor foundation, or no foundation at all. In short, as the assumption of the sanity of birth, Nature and humanity, is the key to any true theory of life and the universe—at any rate, the only theory out of which I wrote—it is, and must inevitably be, the only key to *Leaves of Grass,* and every part of it. *That,* (and not a vain consistency or weak pride, as a late "Springfield Republican" charges,) is the reason that I have stood out for these particular verses uncompromisingly for over twenty years, and maintain them to this day. *That* is what I felt in my inmost brain and heart, when I only answer'd Emerson's vehement arguments with silence, under the old elms of Boston Common.

Indeed, might not every physiologist and every good physician pray for the redeeming of this subject from its hitherto relegation to the tongues and pens of blackguards, and boldly putting it for once at least, if no more, in the demesne of poetry and sanity—as something not in itself gross or impure, but entirely consistent with highest manhood and womanhood, and indispensable to both? Might not only every wife and every mother—not only every babe that comes into the world, if that were possible—not only all marriage, the foundation and *sine qua non*

of the civilized state—bless and thank the showing, or taking for granted, that motherhood, fatherhood, sexuality, and all that belongs to them, can be asserted, where it comes to question, openly, joyously, proudly, "without shame or the need of shame," from the highest artistic and human considerations—but, with reverence be it written, on such attempt to justify the base and start of the whole divine scheme in humanity, might not the Creative Power itself deign a smile of approval?

To the movement for the eligibility and entrance of women amid new spheres of business, politics, and the suffrage, the current prurient, conventional treatment of sex is the main formidable obstacle. The rising tide of "woman's rights," swelling and every year advancing farther and farther, recoils from it with dismay. There will in my opinion be no general progress in such eligibility till a sensible, philosophic, democratic method is substituted.

—From *A Memorandum at Venture*

EVASIONS AND SUPPRESSIONS

From another point of view *Leaves of Grass* is avowedly the song of Sex and Amativeness, and even Animality—though meanings that do not usually go along with those words are behind all, and will duly emerge; and all are sought to be lifted into a different light and atmosphere. Of this feature, intentionally palpable in a few lines, I shall only say the espousing principle of those lines so gives breath of life to my whole scheme that the bulk of the pieces might as well have been left unwritten were those lines omitted. Difficult as it will be, it has become, in my opinion, imperative to achieve a shifted attitude from superior men and women towards the thought and fact of sexuality, as an element in character, personality, the emotions, and a theme in literature. I am not going to argue the question by itself; it does not stand by itself. The vitality of it is altogether in its relations, bearings, significance—like the clef of a symphony. At last analogy the lines I allude to, and the spirit in which they are spoken, permeate all *Leaves of Grass,* and the

work must stand or fall with them, as the human body and soul must remain as an entirety.

Universal as are certain facts and symptoms of communities or individuals all times, there is nothing so rare in modern conventions and poetry as their normal recognizance. Literature is always calling in the doctor for consultation and confession, and always giving evasions and swathing suppressions in place of that "heroic nudity" on which only a genuine diagnosis of serious cases can be built. And in respect to editions of *Leaves of Grass* in time to come (if there should be such) I take occasion now to confirm those lines with the settled convictions and deliberate renewals of thirty years, and to hereby prohibit, as far as word of mine can do so, any elision of them.

—From *A Backward Glance O'er Travel'd Roads*

"Everyone that speaks his word for slavery, is himself the worst slave...."

4. *The Basest Outrage*

THE RUNAWAY SLAVE

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and assured him.

And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and gave him some coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner....

The Negro holds firmly the reins of his four horses, the block swags underneath on its tied-over chain,
The Negro that drives the long dray of the stone-yard, steady and tall he stands pois'd on one leg on the string-piece,
His blue shirt exposes his ample neck and breast and loosens over his hip-band,
His glance is calm and commanding, he tosses the slouch of his hat away from his forehead,
The sun falls on his crispy hair and mustache, falls on the black of his polish'd and perfect limbs.

I behold the picturesque giant and love him, and I do not stop there,
I go with the team also.

In me the caresser of life wherever moving, backward as well as forward sluing,
To niches aside and junior bending, not a person or object missing,
Absorbing all to myself and for this song....

The disdain and calmness of martyrs,
The mother of old, condemn'd for a witch, burnt with dry wood, her children gazing on,
The hounded slave that flags in the race, leans by the fence, blowing, cover'd with sweat,
The twinges that sting like needles his legs and neck, the murderous buckshot and the bullets,
All these I feel or am.

I am the hounded slave, I wince at the bite of the dogs,
Hell and despair are upon me, crack and again crack the marksmen,
I clutch the rails of the fence, my gore dribs, thinn'd with the ooze of my skin,
I fall on the weeds and stones,
The riders spur their unwilling horses, haul close,
Taunt my dizzy ears and beat me violently over the head with whip-stocks.

Agonies are one of my changes of garments,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels, I myself become the wounded person,
My hurts turn livid upon me as I lean on a cane and observe.

From *Song of Myself*

BODIES AT AUCTION

The man's body is sacred and the woman's body is sacred,
No matter who it is, it is sacred—is it the meanest one in the laborers' gang?
Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?
Each belongs here or anywhere just as much as the well-off, just as much as you,
Each has his or her place in the procession.

(All is a procession,
The universe is a procession with measured and perfect motion.)

Do you know so much yourself that you call the meanest ignorant?
Do you suppose you have a right to a good sight, and he or she has no right to a sight?
Do you think matter has cohered together from its diffuse float, and the soil is on the surface, and water runs and vegetation sprouts,
For you only, and not for him and her?

A man's body at auction,
(For before the war I often go to the slave-mart and watch the sale,)
I help the auctioneer, the sloven does not half know his business.

Gentlemen look on this wonder,
Whatever the bids of the bidders they cannot be high enough for it,
For it the globe lay preparing quintillions of years without one animal or plant,
For it the revolving cycles truly and steadily roll'd.

In this head the all-baffling brain,
In it and below it the makings of heroes.

Examine these limbs, red, black, or white, they are cunning in tendon and nerve,
They shall be stript that you may see them.

Exquisite senses, life-lit eyes, pluck, volition,
Flakes of breast-muscle, pliant backbone and neck, flesh not flabby, good-sized arms and legs,
And wonders within there yet.

Within there runs blood,
The same old blood! the same red-running blood!
There swells and jets a heart, there all passions, desires, reachings, aspirations,
(Do you think they are not there because they are not express'd in parlors and lecture-rooms?)

This is not only one man, this the father of those who shall be fathers in their turns,
In him the start of populous states and rich republics,
Of him countless immortal lives with countless embodiments and enjoyments.

How do you know who shall come from the offspring of his offspring through the centuries?
(Who might you find you have come from yourself, if you could trace back through the centuries?)

A woman's body at auction,
She too is not only herself, she is the teeming mother of mothers,
She is the bearer of them that shall grow and be mates to the mothers.

Have you ever loved the body of a woman?
Have you ever loved the body of a man?
Do you not see that these are exactly the same to all in all nations and all times all over the earth?

From *I Sing the Body Electric*

ETHIOPIA SALUTING THE COLORS

Who are you dusky woman, so ancient hardly human,
With your woolly-white and turban'd head, and bare bony feet?
Why rising by the roadside here, do you the colors greet?

('Tis while our army lines Carolina's sands and pines,
Forth from thy hovel door thou Ethiopia com'st to me,
As under doughty Sherman I march toward the sea.)

Me master years a hundred since from my parents sunder'd,
A little child, they caught me as the savage beast is caught,
Then hither me across the sea the cruel slaver brought.

No further does she say, but lingering all the day,
Her high-borne turban'd head she wags, and rolls her darkling eye,
And courtesies to the regiments, the guidons moving by.

What is it fateful woman, so blear, hardly human?
Why wag your head with turban bound, yellow, red and green?
Are the things so strange and marvelous you see or have seen?

FREEDOM SELLERS OF THE EARTH

The sixteenth and seventeenth terms of the American Presidency have shown that the villainy and shallowness of great rulers are just as eligible to These States as to any foreign despotism, kingdom, or empire—there is not a bit of difference. History is to record these two Presidencies as so far our topmost warning and shame. Never were publicly displayed more deformed, mediocre, snivelling, unreliable, false-hearted men! Never were These States so insulted, and attempted to be betrayed! All the main purposes for which the government was established are openly denied. The perfect equality of slavery with freedom is flauntingly preached in the North, nay, the superiority of slavery. The slave trade is proposed to be renewed. Everywhere frowns

and misunderstandings—everywhere exasperations and humiliations. The President eats dirt and excrement for his daily meals, likes it, and tries to force it on The States. The cushions of the Presidency are nothing but filth and blood. The pavements of Congress are also bloody. The land that flushed amazed at the basest outrage of our times, grows pale with a far different feeling to see the outrage unanimously commended back again to those who only half rejected it. The national tendency toward populating territories full of free work-people, established by the organic compacts of These States, promulged by the fathers, the Presidents, the old warriors, and the earlier Congresses, a tendency vital to the life and thrift of the masses of the citizens, is violently put back under the feet of slavery, and against the free people the masters of slaves are everywhere held up by the President by the red hand. In fifteen of The States the three hundred and fifty thousand masters keep down the true people, the millions of white citizens, mechanics, farmers, boatmen, manufacturers, and the like, excluding them from politics and from office, and punishing by the lash, by tar and feathers, binding fast to rafts on the river or trees in the woods, and sometimes by death, all attempts to discuss the evils of slavery in its relations to the whites. The people of the territories are denied the power to form State governments unless they consent to fasten upon them the slave-hopple, the iron wristlet, and the neck-spike. For refusing such consent, the governor and part of the legislature of the State of Kansas are chased, seized, chained, by the creatures of the President, and are to-day in chains. Over the vast continental tracts of unorganized American territory, equal in extent to all the present organized States, and in future to give the law to all, the whole executive, judicial, military and naval power of These States is forsworn to the people, the rightful owners, and sworn to the help of the three hundred and fifty thousand masters of slaves, to put them through this continent, with their successors, at their pleasure, and to maintain by force their mastership over their slave men and women, slave-farmers, slave-miners, slave-cartmen, slave-sailors, and the like. Slavery is adopted as an American institution, superior, national, constitutional right in itself, and under no circumstances to take any

less than freedom takes. Nor is that all; to-day, to-night, the constables and commissioners of the President can by law step into any part of These States and pick out whom they please, deciding which man or woman they will allow to be free, and which shall be a slave, no jury to intervene, but the commissioner's mandate to be enforced by the federal troops and cannon, and has been actually so enforced.

Are the states retarded then? No; while all is drowned and desperate that the government has had to do with, all the outside influence of government, (forever the largest part,) thrives and smiles. The sun shines, corn grows, men go merrily about their affairs, houses are built, ships arrive and depart. Through evil and through good, the republic stands, and is for centuries yet to stand, immovable from its foundations. No, no; out at dastards and disgraces, fortunate are the wrongs that call forth stout and angry men; then is shown what stuff there is in a nation.

The young genius of America is not going to be emasculated and strangled just as it arrives toward manly age. It shall live, and yet baffle the politicians and the three hundred and fifty thousand masters of slaves.

Now the term of the seventeenth Presidency passing hooted and spurned to its close, the delegates of the politicians have nominated for the eighteenth term, Buchanan of Pennsylvania, and Fillmore of New York, separate tickets, but men both patterned to follow and match the seventeenth term, both disunionists, both old politicians, both sworn down to the theories of special parties, and of all others the theories that balk and reverse the main purposes of the founders of These States. Such are the nominees that have arisen out of the power of the politicians, but another power has also arisen. A new race copiously appears, with resolute tread, soon to confront Presidents, congresses and parties, to look them sternly in the face, to stand no nonsense, American young men, the offspring and proof of These States, the West the same as the East, and the South alike with the North.

America sends these young men in good time, for they were needed. Much waits to be done. First, people need to realize who are poisoning the politics of These States.

Whence the delegates of the politicians? Whence the Buchanan and Fillmore Conventions? Not from sturdy American freemen; not from industrious homes; not from thrifty farms; not from the ranks of fresh-bodied young men; not from among teachers, poets, savans, learned persons, beloved persons, temperate persons; not from among ship-builders, engineers, agriculturists, scythe-swingers, corn-hoers; not from the race of mechanics; not from that great strong stock of Southerners that supplied the land in old times; not from the real West, the log-hut, the clearing, the woods, the prairie, the hill-side; not from the sensible, generous, rude Californian miners; not from the best specimens of Massachusetts, Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, nor from the untainted unpolitical citizens of the cities.

Whence then do these nominating dictators of America year after year start out? From lawyers' offices, secret lodges, backyards, bed-houses, and bar-rooms; from out of the custom-houses, marshals' offices, post-offices, and gambling hells; from the President's house, the jail, the venereal hospital, the station-house; from unnamed by-places where devilish disunion is hatched at midnight; from political hearses, and from the coffins inside, and from the shrouds inside the coffins; from the tumors and abscesses of the land; from the skeletons and skulls in the vaults of the federal almshouses; from the running sores of the great cities; thence to the national, state, city, and district nominating conventions of These States, come the most numerous and controlling delegates.

Who are they personally? Office-holders, office-seekers, robbers, pimps, exclusives, malignants, conspirators, murderers, fancy-men, port-masters, custom-house clerks, contractors, kept-editors, Spaniels well-trained to carry and fetch, jobbers, infidels, disunionists, terrorists, mail-riflers, slave-catchers, pushers of Slavery, creatures of the President, creatures of would-be Presidents, spies, blowers, electioneers, body-snatchers, bawlers, bribers, compromisers, runaways, lobbyers, sponges, ruined sports, expelled gamblers, policy backers, monte-dealers, duelists, carriers of concealed weapons, blind men, deaf men, pimpled men, scarred inside with the vile disorder, gaudy outside with gold chains made from the people's

money and harlot's money twisted together; crawling, serpentine men, the lousy combings and born freedom sellers of the earth.

Stript of padding and paint, who are Buchanan and Fillmore? What has this age to do with them? Two galvanized old men, close on the summons to depart this life, their early contemporaries long since gone, only they two left, relics and proofs of the little political bargains, chances, combinations, resentments of a past age, having nothing in common with this age, standing for the first crop of political graves and grave-stones planted in These States, but in no sort standing for the lusty young growth of the modern times of The States. It is clear from all these two men say and do, that their hearts have not been touched in the least by the flowing fire of the humanitarianism of the new world, its best glory yet, and a moral control stronger than all its governments. It is clear that neither of these nominees of the politicians has thus far reached an inkling of the real scope and character of the contest of the day, probably now only well begun, to stretch through years, with varied temporary successes and reverses. Still the two old men live in respectable little spots, with respectable little wants. Still their eyes stop at the edges of the tables of committees and cabinets, beholding not the great round world beyond. What has this age to do with them?

You Americans who travel with such men, or who are nominated on tickets any where with them, or who support them at popular meetings, or write for them in the newspapers, or who believe that any good can come out of them, you also understand not the present age, the fibre of it, the countless currents it brings of American young men, a different superior race. All this effervescence is not for nothing; the friendlier, vaster, more vital modern spirit, hardly yet arrived at definite proportions, or to the knowledge of itself, will have the mastery. The like turmoil prevails in the expressions of literature, manners, trade, and other departments.

To butchers, sailors, stevedores, and drivers of horses—to ploughmen, wood-cutters, marketmen, carpenters, masons, and laborers —to workmen in factories—and to all in These States who live by their daily toil. Mechanics! A parcel of windy northern liars are bawling in your ears the easily-spoken words Democracy and

the democratic party. Others are making a great ado with the word Americanism, a solemn and great word. What the so-called democracy are now sworn to perform would eat the faces off the succeeding generations of common people worse than the most horrible disease. The others are contributing to the like performance, and are using the great word Americanism without yet feeling the first aspiration of it, as the great word Religion has been used, probably loudest and oftenest used, by men that made indiscriminate massacres at night, and filled the world so full with hatreds, horrors, partialities, exclusions, bloody revenges, penal conscience laws and test oaths. To the virtue of Americanism is happening to-day, what happens many days to many virtues, namely, the masses who possess them but do not understand them are sought to be sold by that very means to those who neither possess them nor understand them. What are the young men suspicious of? I will tell them what it stands them in hand to be suspicious of, and that is American craft; it is subtler than Italian craft; I guess it is about the subtlest craft upon the earth.

What is there in prospect for free farmers and work people? A few generations ago, the general run of farmers and workpeople like us were slaves, serfs, deprived of their liberty by law; they are still so deprived on some parts of the continent of Europe. To-day, those who are free here, and free in the British islands and elsewhere, are free through deeds that were done, and men that lived, some of them an age or so ago, and some of them many ages ago. The men and deeds of these days also decide for generations ahead, as past men and deeds decided for us.

As the broad fat States of the West, the largest and best parts of the inheritance of the American farmers and mechanics, were ordained to common people and workmen long in advance by Jefferson, Washington, and the earlier Congresses, now a far ampler west is to be ordained. Is it to be ordained to workmen, or the masters of workmen? Shall the future mechanics of America be serfs? Shall labor be degraded, and women be whipt in the fields for not performing their tasks? If slaves are not prohibited from all national territory by law, as prohibited in the beginning, as the organic compacts authorize and require, and if, on the contrary, the entrance and establishment of slave labor

through the continent is secured, there will steadily wheel into this Union, for centuries to come, slave state after slave state, the entire surface of the land owned by great proprietors, in plantations of thousands of acres, showing no more sight for free races of farmers and work-people than there is now in any European despotism or aristocracy; and the existence of our present Free States put in jeopardy, because out of that vast territory are to come states enough to overbalance all.

Workmen! Workwomen! Those immense national American tracts belong to you; they are in trust with you; they are latent with the populous cities, numberless farms, herds, granaries, groves, golden gardens, and inalienable homesteads, of your successors. The political blowers and kept-editors of the North are raising a fog of prevarications around you. But the manlier Southern disunionists, the chieftains among the three hundred and fifty thousand masters, clearly distinguish the issue, and the principle it rests upon. McDuffie, disunionist governor, lays it down with candid boldness that the workingmen of a state are unsafe depositaries of political powers and rights, and that a republic can not permanently exist unless those who ply the mechanical trades and attend to the farm-work are slaves, subordinated by strict laws to their masters. Calhoun, disunionist senator, denounces and denies, in the presence of the world, the main article of the organic compact of These States, that all men are born free and equal, and bequeaths to his followers, at present leaders of the three hundred and fifty thousand masters, guides of the so-called democracy, counsellors of Presidents, and getters-up of the nominations of Buchanan and Fillmore, his deliberate charge, to be carried out against that main article, that it is the most false and dangerous of all political errors; such being the words of that charge, spoken in the summer of the 73d year of These States, and, indeed, carried out since in the spirit of congressional legislation, executive action, and the candidates offered by the political parties to the people.

—From *The Eighteenth Presidency*

"...a battle-call rousing to arms if need be,
years, centuries hence."

5. *The Civil War*

FIRST O SONGS FOR A PRELUDE

First O songs for a prelude,
Lightly strike on the stretch'd tympanum pride and joy in my city,
How she led the rest to arms, how she gave the cue,
How at once with lithe limbs unwaiting a moment she sprang,
(O superb! O Manhattan, my own, my peerless!
O strongest you in the hour of danger, in crisis! O truer than steel!)
How you sprang—how you threw off the costumes of peace with indifferent hand,
How your soft opera-music changed, and the drum and fife were heard in their stead,
How you led to the war, (that shall serve for our prelude, songs of soldiers,)
How Manhattan drum-taps led.

Forty years had I in my city seen soldiers parading,
Forty years as a pageant, till unawares the lady of this teeming and turbulent city,
Sleepless amid her ships, her houses, her incalculable wealth,
With her million children around her, suddenly,
At dead of night, at news from the south,
Incens'd struck with clinch'd hand the pavement.

A shock electric, the night sustain'd it,
Till with ominous hum our hive at daybreak pour'd out its myriads.

From the houses then and the workshops, and through all the doorways,
Leapt they tumultuous, and lo! Manhattan arming.

To the drum-taps prompt,
The young men falling in and arming,
The mechanics arming, (the trowel, the jack-plane, the blacksmith's hammer, tost aside with precipitation,)
The lawyer leaving his office and arming, the judge leaving the court,
The driver deserting his wagon in the street, jumping down, throwing the reins abruptly down on the horses' backs,
The salesman leaving the store, the boss, book-keeper, porter, all leaving;
Squads gather everywhere by common consent and arm,
The new recruits, even boys, the old men show them how to wear their accoutrements, they buckle the straps carefully,
Outdoors arming, indoors arming, the flash of the musket-barrels,
The white tents cluster in camps, the arm'd sentries around, the sunrise cannon and again at sunset,
Arm'd regiments arrive every day, pass through the city, and embark from the wharves,
(How good they look as they tramp down to the river, sweaty, with their guns on their shoulders!
How I love them! how I could hug them, with their brown faces and their clothes and knapsacks cover'd with dust!)
The blood of the city up—arm'd! arm'd! the cry everywhere,
The flags flung out from the steeples of churches and from all the public buildings and stores,
The tearful parting, the mother kisses her son, the son kisses his mother,
(Loth is the mother to part, yet not a word does she speak to detain him,)
The tumultuous escort, the ranks of policemen preceding, clearing the way,
The unpent enthusiasm, the wild cheers of the crowd for their favorites,
The artillery, the silent cannons bright as gold, drawn along, rumble lightly over the stones,
(Silent cannons, soon to cease your silence,
Soon unlimber'd to begin the red business;)
All the mutter of preparation, all the determin'd arming,

The hospital service, the lint, bandages and medicines,
The women volunteering for nurses, the work begun for in earnest, no mere parade now;
War! an arm'd race is advancing! the welcome for battle, no turning away;
War! be it weeks, months, or years, an arm'd race is advancing to welcome it.

Mannahatta a-march—and it's O to sing it well!
It's O for a manly life in the camp.

And the sturdy artillery,
The guns bright as gold, the work for giants, to serve well the guns,
Unlimber them! (no more as the past forty years for salutes for courtesies merely,
Put in something now besides powder and wadding.)

And you lady of ships, you Mannahatta,
Old matron of this proud, friendly, turbulent city,
Often in peace and wealth you were pensive or covertly frown'd amid all your children,
But now you smile with joy exulting old Mannahatta.

EIGHTEEN SIXTY-ONE

Arm'd year—year of the struggle,
No dainty rhymes or sentimental love verses for you terrible year,
Not you as some pale poetling seated at a desk lisping cadenzas piano,
But as a strong man erect, clothed in blue clothes, advancing, carrying a rifle on your shoulder,
With well-gristled body and sunburnt face and hands, with a knife in the belt at your side,
As I heard you shouting loud, your sonorous voice ringing across the continent,
Your masculine voice O year, as rising amid the great cities,

Amid the men of Manhattan I saw you as one of the workmen, the dwellers in Manhattan,
Or with large steps crossing the prairies out of Illinois and Indiana,
Rapidly crossing the West with springy gait and descending the Alleghanies,
Or down from the great lakes or in Pennsylvania, or on deck along the Ohio river,
Or southward along the Tennessee or Cumberland rivers, or at Chattanooga on the mountain top,
Saw I your gait and saw I your sinewy limbs clothed in blue, bearing weapons, robust year,
Heard your determin'd voice launch'd forth again and again,
Year that suddenly sang by the mouths of the round-lipp'd cannon,
I repeat you, hurrying, crashing, sad, distracted year.

BEAT! BEAT! DRUMS!

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows—through doors—burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field or gathering his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of wheels in the streets;
Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? no sleepers must sleep in those beds,
No bargainers' bargains by day—no brokers or speculators—would they continue?

Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing?
Would the lawyer rise in the court to state his case before the judge?
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums!—blow! bugles! blow!
Make no parley—stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer,
Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,
So strong you thump O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.

THUNDER ON, DEMOCRACY!

Thunder on! stride on, Democracy! strike with vengeful stroke!
And do you rise higher than ever yet O days, O cities!
Crash heavier, heavier yet O storms! you have done me good,
My soul prepared in the mountains absorbs your immortal strong nutriment,
Long had I walk'd my cities, my country roads through farms, only half satisfied,
One doubt nauseous undulating like a snake, crawl'd on the ground before me,
Continually preceding my steps, turning upon me oft, ironically hissing low;
The cities I loved so well I abandon'd and left, I sped to the certainties suitable to me,
Hungering, hungering, hungering, for primal energies and Nature's dauntlessness,
I refresh'd myself with it only, I could relish it only,
I waited the bursting forth of the pent fire—on the water and air I waited long;
But now I no longer wait, I am fully satisfied, I am glutted,
I have witness'd the true lightning, I have witness'd my cities electric,

I have lived to behold man burst forth and warlike America rise,
Hence I will seek no more the food of the northern solitary wilds,
No more the mountains roam or sail the stormy sea.

From *Rise O Days From Your Fathomless Deeps*

BY THE BIVOUAC'S FITFUL FLAME

By the bivouac's fitful flame,
A procession winding around me, solemn and sweet and slow—but first I note,
The tents of the sleeping army, the fields' and woods' dim outline,
The darkness lit by spots of kindled fire, the silence,
Like a phantom far or near an occasional figure moving,
The shrubs and trees, (as I lift my eyes they seem to be stealthily watching me,)
While wind in procession thoughts, O tender and wondrous thoughts,
Of life and death, of home and the past and loved, and of those that are far away;
A solemn and slow procession there as I sit on the ground,
By the bivouac's fitful flame.

A MARCH IN THE RANKS HARD-PREST, AND THE ROAD UNKNOWN

A march in the ranks hard-prest, and the road unknown,
A route through a heavy wood with muffled steps in the darkness,
Our army foil'd with loss severe, and the sullen remnant retreating,
Till after midnight glimmer upon us the lights of a dim-lighted building,

We come to an open space in the woods, and halt by the dim-lighted building,
'Tis a large old church at the crossing roads, now an impromptu hospital,
Entering but for a minute I see a sight beyond all the pictures and poems ever made,
Shadows of deepest, deepest black, just lit by moving candles and lamps,
And by one great pitchy torch stationary with wild red flame and clouds of smoke,
By these, crowds, groups of forms vaguely I see on the floor, some in the pews laid down,
At my feet more distinctly a soldier, a mere lad, in danger of bleeding to death, (he is shot in the abdomen,)
I stanch the blood temporarily, (the youngster's face is white as a lily,)
Then before I depart I sweep my eyes o'er the scene fain to absorb it all,
Faces, varieties, postures beyond description, most in obscurity, some of them dead,
Surgeons operating, attendants holding lights, the smell of ether, the odor of blood,
The crowd, O the crowd of the bloody forms, the yard outside also fill'd,
Some on the bare ground, some on planks or stretchers, some in the death-spasm sweating,
An occasional scream or cry, the doctor's shouted orders or calls,
The glisten of the little steel instruments catching the glint of the torches,
These I resume as I chant, I see again the forms, I smell the odor,
Then hear outside the orders given, *Fall in, my men, fall in;*
But first I bend to the dying lad, his eyes open, a half-smile gives he me,
Then the eyes close, calmly close, and I speed forth to the darkness,
Resuming, marching, ever in darkness marching, on in the ranks,
The unknown road still marching.

NOT THE PILOT

Not the pilot has charged himself to bring his ship into port,
though beaten back and many times baffled;
Not the pathfinder penetrating inland weary and long,
By deserts parch'd, snows chill'd, rivers wet, perseveres till he
reaches his destination,
More than I have charged myself, heeded or unheeded, to com-
pose a march for these States,
For a battle-call, rousing to arms if need be, years, centuries
hence.

LONG, TOO LONG AMERICA

Long, too long, America,
Traveling roads all even and peaceful you learn'd from joys and
prosperity only,
But now, ah now, to learn from crises of anguish, advancing,
grappling with direst fate and recoiling not,
And now to conceive and show to the world what your children
en-masse really are,
(For who except myself has yet conceiv'd what your children
en-masse really are?)

OVER THE CARNAGE ROSE PROPHETIC A VOICE

Over the carnage rose prophetic a voice,
Be not dishearten'd, affection shall solve the problems of free-
dom yet,
Those who love each other shall become invincible,
They shall yet make Columbia victorious.

Sons of the Mother of All, you shall yet be victorious,
You shall yet laugh to scorn the attacks of all the remainder of
the earth.
No danger shall balk Columbia's lovers,
If need be a thousand shall sternly immolate themselves for
one.

One from Massachusetts shall be a Missourian's comrade,
From Maine and from hot Carolina, and another an Oregonese, shall be friends triune,
More precious to each other than all the riches of the earth.

To Michigan, Florida perfumes shall tenderly come,
Not the perfumes of flowers, but sweeter, and wafted beyond death.

It shall be customary in the houses and streets to see manly affection,
The most dauntless and rude shall touch face to face lightly,
The dependence of Liberty shall be lovers,
The continuance of Equality shall be comrades.

These shall tie you and band you stronger than hoops of iron,
I, ecstatic, O partners! O lands! with the love of lovers tie you.

(Were you looking to be held together by lawyers?
Or by an agreement on a paper? or by arms?
Nay, nor the world, nor any living thing, will so cohere.)

THE ARTILLERYMAN'S VISION

While my wife at my side lies slumbering, and the wars are over long,
And my head on the pillow rests at home, and the vacant midnight passes,
And through the stillness, through the dark, I hear, just hear, the breath of my infant,
There in the room as I wake from sleep this vision presses upon me;
The engagement opens there and then in fantasy unreal,
The skirmishes begin, they crawl cautiously ahead, I hear the irregular snap! snap!
I hear the sounds of the different missiles, the short *t-h-t! t-h-t!* of the rifle-balls,

I see the shells exploding leaving small white clouds, I hear the great shells shrieking as they pass,
The grape like the hum and whirr of wind through the trees, (tumultuous now the contest rages,)
All the scenes at the batteries rise in detail before me again,
The crashing and smoking, the pride of the men in their pieces,
The chief-gunner ranges and sights his piece and selects a fuse of the right time,
After firing I see him lean aside and look eagerly off to note the effect;
Elsewhere I hear the cry of a regiment charging, (the young colonel leads himself this time with brandish'd sword,)
I see the gaps cut by the enemy's volleys, (quickly fill'd up, no delay,)
I breathe the suffocating smoke, then the flat clouds hover low concealing all;
Now a strange lull for a few seconds, not a shot fired on either side,
Then resumed the chaos louder than ever, with eager calls and orders of officers,
While from some distant part of the field the wind wafts to my ears a shout of applause, (some special success,)
And ever the sound of the cannon far or near, (rousing even in dreams a devilish exultation and all the old mad joy in the depths of my soul,)
And ever the hastening of infantry shifting positions, batteries, cavalry, moving hither and thither,
(The falling, dying, I heed not, the wounded dripping and red I heed not, some to the rear are hobbling,)
Grime, heat, rush, aides-de-camp galloping by or on a full run,
With the patter of small arms, the warning *s-s-t* of the rifles, (these in my vision I hear or see,)
And bombs bursting in air, and at night the vari-color'd rockets.

SPIRIT WHOSE WORK IS DONE

Washington City, 1865

Spirit whose work is done—spirit of dreadful hours!
Ere departing fade from my eyes your forests of bayonets;
Spirit of gloomiest fears and doubts, (yet onward ever unfaltering pressing,)
Spirit of many a solemn day and many a savage scene—electric spirit,
That with muttering voice through the war now closed, like a tireless phantom flitted,
Rousing the land with breath of flame, while you beat and beat the drum,
Now as the sound of the drum, hollow and harsh to the last, reverberates round me,
As your ranks, your immortal ranks, return, return from the battles,
As the muskets of the young men yet lean over their shoulders,
As I look on the bayonets bristling over their shoulders,
As those slanted bayonets, whose forests of them appearing in the distance, approach and pass on, returning homeward,
Moving with steady motion, swaying to and fro to the right and left,
Evenly lightly rising and falling while the steps keep time;
Spirit of hours I knew, all hectic red one day, but pale as death next day,
Touch my mouth ere you depart, press my lips close,
Leave me your pulses of rage—bequeath them to me—fill me with currents convulsive,
Let them scorch and blister out of my chants when you are gone,
Let them identify you to the future in these songs.

ADIEU TO A SOLDIER

Adieu O soldier,
You of the rude campaigning, (which we shared,)
The rapid march, the life of the camp,
The hot contention of opposing fronts, the long manœuvre,
Red battles with their slaughter, the stimulus, the strong terrific game,
Spell of all brave and manly hearts, the trains of time through you and like of you all fill'd,
With war and war's expression.

Adieu dear comrade,
Your mission is fulfill'd—but I, more warlike,
Myself and this contentious soul of mine,
Still on our own campaigning bound,
Through untried roads with ambushes opponents lined,
Through many a sharp defeat and many a crisis, often baffled,
Here marching, ever marching on, a war fight out—aye here,
To fiercer, weightier battles give expression.

TURN O LIBERTAD

Turn O Libertad, for the war is over,
From it and all henceforth expanding, doubting no more, resolute, sweeping the world,
Turn from lands retrospective recording proofs of the past,
From the singers that sing the trailing glories of the past,
From the chants of the feudal world, the triumphs of kings, slavery, caste,
Turn to the world, the triumphs reserv'd and to come—give up that backward world,
Leave to the singers of hitherto, give them the trailing past,
But what remains remains for singers for you—wars to come are for you,
(Lo, how the wars of the past have duly inured to you, and the wars of the present also inure;)

Then turn, and be not alarm'd O Libertad—turn your undying face,
To where the future, greater than all the past,
Is swiftly, surely preparing for you.

THE REAL WAR WILL NEVER GET IN THE BOOKS

And so good-bye to the war. I know not how it may have been, or may be, to others—to me the main interest I found, (and still, on recollection, find,) in the rank and file of the armies, both sides, and in those specimens amid the hospitals, and even the dead on the field. To me the points illustrating the latent personal character and eligibilities of these States, in the two or three millions of American young and middle-aged men, North and South, embodied in those armies—and especially the one-third or one-fourth of their number, stricken by wounds or disease at some time in the course of the contest—were of more significance even than the political interests involved. (As so much of a race depends on how it faces death, and how it stands personal anguish and sickness. As, in the glints of emotions under emergencies, and the indirect traits and asides in Plutarch, we get far profounder clues to the antique world than all its more formal history.)

Future years will never know the seething hell and the black infernal background of countless minor scenes and interiors, (not the official surface-courteousness of the Generals, not the few great battles) of the Secession war; and it is best they should not—the real war will never get in the books. In the mushy influences of current times, too, the fervid atmosphere and typical events of those years are in danger of being totally forgotten. I have at night watch'd by the side of a sick man in the hospital, one who could not live many hours. I have seen his eyes flash and burn as he raised himself and recurr'd to the cruelties on his surrender'd brother, and mutilations of the corpse afterward. ... The incident at Upperville—the seventeen kill'd as in the description, were left there on the ground. After they dropt dead,

no one touch'd them—all were made sure of, however. The carcasses were left for the citizens to bury or not, as they chose.

Such was the war. It was not a quadrille in a ball-room. Its interior history will not only never be written—its practicality, minutiæ of deeds and passions, will never be even suggested. The actual soldier of 1862-'65, North and South, with all his ways, his incredible dauntlessness, habits, practices, tastes, language, his fierce friendship, his appetite, rankness, his superb strength and animality, lawless gait, and a hundred unnamed lights and shades of camp, I say, will never be written—perhaps must not and should not be.

The preceding notes may furnish a few stray glimpses into that life, and into those lurid interiors, never to be fully convey'd to the future. The hospital part of the drama from '61 to '65, deserves indeed to be recorded. Of that many-threaded drama, with its sudden and strange surprises, its confounding of prophecies, its moments of despair, the dread of foreign interference, the interminable campaigns, the bloody battles, the mighty and cumbrous and green armies, the drafts and bounties—the immense money expenditure, like a heavy-pouring constant rain—with, over the whole land, the last three years of the struggle, an unending, universal mourning-wail of women, parents, orphans —the marrow of the tragedy concentrated in those Army Hospitals—(it seem'd sometimes as if the whole interest of the land, North and South, was one vast central hospital, and all the rest of the affair but flanges)—those forming the untold and unwritten history of the war—infinitely greater (like life's) than the few scraps and distortions that are ever told or written. Think how much, and of importance, will be—how much, civic and military, has already been—buried in the grave, in eternal darkness.

AN ARMY HOSPITAL WARD

Let me specialize a visit I made to the collection of barrack-like one-story edifices, Campbell hospital, out on the flats, at the end of the then horse railway route, on Seventh street. There is a long building appropriated to each ward. Let us

go into ward 6. It contains, to-day, I should judge, eighty or a hundred patients, half sick, half wounded. The edifice is nothing but boards, well white-wash'd inside, and the usual slender-framed iron bedsteads, narrow and plain. You walk down the central passage, with a row on either side, their feet towards you, and their heads to the wall. There are fires in large stoves, and the prevailing white of the walls is reliev'd by some ornaments, stars, circles, etc., made of evergreens. The view of the whole edifice and occupants can be taken at once, for there is no partition. You may hear groans or other sounds of unendurable suffering from two or three of the cots, but in the main there is quite—almost a painful absence of demonstration; but the pallid face, the dull'd eye, and the moisture of the lip, are demonstration enough. Most of these sick or hurt are evidently young fellows from the country, farmers' sons, and such like. Look at the fine large frames, the bright and broad countenances, and the many yet lingering proofs of strong constitution and physique. Look at the patient and mute manner of our American wounded as they lie in such a sad collection; representatives from all New England, and from New York, and New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—indeed from all the States and all the cities—largely from the west. Most of them are entirely without friends or acquaintances here—no familiar face, and hardly a word of judicious sympathy or cheer, through their sometimes long and tedious sickness, or the pangs of aggravated wounds.

THE RANK AND FILE

The movements of the late secession war, and their results, to any sense that studies well and comprehends them, show that popular democracy, whatever its faults and dangers, practically justifies itself beyond the proudest claims and widest hopes of its enthusiasts. Probably no future age can know, but I well know, how the gist of this fiercest and most resolute of the world's war-like contentions resided exclusively in the unnamed, unknown rank and file; and how the brunt of its labor of death was, to all essential purposes, volunteer'd. The People, of their

own choice, fighting, dying for their own idea, insolently attack'd by the secession-slave-power, and its very existence imperil'd. Descending to detail, entering any of the armies, and mixing with the private soldiers, we see and have seen august spectacles. We have seen the alacrity with which the American-born populace, the peaceablest and most good-natured race in the world, and the most personally independent and intelligent, and the least fitted to submit to the irksomeness and exasperation of regimental discipline, sprang, at the first tap of the drum, to arms—not for gain, nor even glory, nor to repel invasion—but for an emblem, a mere abstraction—for the life, *the safety of the flag*. We have seen the unequal'd docility and obedience of these soldiers. We have seen them tried long and long by hopelessness, mismanagement, and by defeat; have seen the incredible slaughter toward or through which the armies (as at first Fredericksburg, and afterward at the Wilderness,) still unhesitatingly obey'd orders to advance. We have seen them in trench, or crouching behind breastwork, or tramping in deep mud, or amid pouring rain or thick-falling snow, or under forced marches in hottest summer (as on the road to get to Gettysburg)—vast suffocating swarms, divisions, corps, with every single man so grimed and black with sweat and dust, his own mother would not have known him—his clothes all dirty, stain'd and torn, with sour, accumulated sweat for perfume—many a comrade, perhaps a brother, sun-struck, staggering out, dying, by the roadside, of exhaustion—yet the great bulk bearing steadily on, cheery enough, hollow-bellied from hunger, but sinewy with unconquerable resolution.

We have seen this race proved by wholesale, by drearier, yet more fearful tests—the wound, the amputation, the shatter'd face or limb, the slow hot fever, long impatient anchorage in bed, and all the forms of maiming, operation and disease. Alas! America have we seen, though only in her early youth, already to hospital brought. There have we watch'd these soldiers, many of them only boys in years—mark'd their decorum, their religious nature and fortitude, and their sweet affection. Wholesale, truly. For at the front, and through the camps, in countless tents, stood the regimental, brigade and division hospitals; while everywhere

amid the land, in or near cities, rose clusters of huge, white-wash'd, crowded, one-story wooden barracks; and there ruled agony with bitter scourge, yet seldom brought a cry; and there stalk'd death by day and night along the narrow aisles between the rows of cots, or by the blankets on the ground, and touch'd lightly many a poor sufferer, often with blessed, welcome touch.

I know not whether I shall be understood, but I realize that it is finally from what I learn'd personally mixing in such scenes that I am now penning these pages. One night in the gloomiest period of the war, in the Patent-office hospital in Washington city, as I stood by the bedside of a Pennsylvania soldier, who lay, conscious of quick approaching death, yet perfectly calm, and with noble, spiritual manner, the veteran surgeon, turning aside, said to me, that though he had witness'd many, many deaths of soldiers, and had been a worker at Bull Run, Antietam, Fredericksburg, etc., he had not seen yet the first case of man or boy that met the approach of dissolution with cowardly qualms or terror. My own observation fully bears out the remark.

What have we here, if not, towering above all talk and argument, the plentifully-supplied, last-needed proof of democracy, in its personalities? Curiously enough, too, the proof of this point comes, I should say, every bit as much from the south, as from the north. Although I have spoken only of the latter, yet I deliberately include all. Grand, common stock! to me the accomplish'd and convincing growth, prophetic of the future; proof undeniable to sharpest sense, of perfect beauty, tenderness and pluck, that never feudal lord, nor Greek, nor Roman breed, yet rival'd. Let no tongue ever speak in disparagement of the American races, north or south, to one who has been through the war in the great army hospitals.

—From *Democratic Vistas*

"The Redeemer President of These States is not to be exclusive, but inclusive."

6. *The Great Emancipator*

WHEN LILACS LAST IN THE DOORYARD BLOOM'D

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

O powerful western fallen star!
O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

In the swamp in secluded recesses,
A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary the thrush,
The hermit withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat,
Death's outlet song of life, (for well dear brother I know,
If thou wast not granted to sing thou would'st surely die.)

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
Amid lanes and through old woods, where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting the gray debris,
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes, passing the endless grass,
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprisen,
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards,
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves as of crape-veil'd women standing,
With processions long and winding and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit, with the silent sea of faces and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn,
With all the mournful voices of the dirges pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—where amid these you journey,
With the tolling tolling bells' perpetual clang,
Here, coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

(Nor for you, for one alone,
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring,
For fresh as the morning, thus would I chant a song for you O
sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death, I cover you over with roses and early lilies,
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes,
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you and the coffins all of you O death.)

O western orb sailing the heaven,
Now I know what you must have meant as a month since I
walk'd,
As I walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,
As I saw you had something to tell as you bent to me night after
night,
As you droop'd from the sky low down as if to my side, (while
the other stars all look'd on,)
As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something I
know not what kept me from sleep,)
As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west how
full you were of woe,
As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze in the cool trans-
parent night,
As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward
black of the night,
As my soul in its trouble dissatisfied sank, as where you sad
orb,
Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

Sing on there in the swamp,
O singer bashful and tender, I hear your notes, I hear your call,
I hear, I come presently, I understand you,
But a moment I linger, for the lustrous star has detain'd me,
The star my departing comrade holds and detains me.

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?
And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?
And what shall my perfume be for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds blown from east and west,
Blown from the Eastern sea and blown from the Western sea, till there on the prairies meeting,
These and with these and the breath of my chant,
I'll perfume the grave of him I love.

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,
To adorn the burial-house of him I love?
Pictures of growing spring and farms and homes,
With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright,
With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air,
With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific,
In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there,
With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows,
And the city at hand with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,
And all the scenes of life and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning.

Lo, body and soul—this land,
My own Manhattan with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships,
The varied and ample land, the South and the North in the light, Ohio's shores and flashing Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo, the most excellent sun so calm and haughty,
The violet and purple morn with just-felt breezes,
The gentle soft-born measureless light,
The miracle spreading bathing all, the fulfill'd noon,
The coming eve delicious, the welcome night and the stars,
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid and free and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer!
You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

Now while I sat in the day and look'd forth,
In the close of the day with its light and the fields of spring, and the farmers preparing their crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds and the storms,)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides, and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labor,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals and minutia of daily usages,
And the streets how their throbbings throbb'd, and the cities pent —lo, then and there,
Falling upon them all and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,

Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail,
And I knew death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,
I fled forth to the hiding receiving night that talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me,
The gray-brown bird I know receiv'd us comrades three,
And he sang the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

For deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held as if by their hands my comrades in the night,
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later delicate death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious,
And for love, sweet love—but praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding death.

Dark mother always gliding near with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?
Then I chant it for thee, I glorify thee above all,
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach strong deliveress,
When it is so, when thou hast taken them I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss O death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose saluting thee, adornments and feastings for thee,
And the sights of the open landscape and the high-spread sky are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night in silence under many a star,
The ocean shore and the husky whispering wave whose voice I know,
And the soul turning to thee O vast and well-veil'd death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song,
Over the rising and sinking waves, over the myriad fields and the prairie wide,
Over the dense-pack'd cities all and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee O death.

To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure deliberate notes spreading filling the night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist and the swamp-perfume,
And I with my comrades there in the night.
While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

And I saw askant the armies,
I saw as in noiseless dreams hundreds of battle-flags,
Borne through the smoke of the battles and pierc'd with missiles I saw them,

And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody,
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men, I saw them,
I saw the debris and debris of all the slain soldiers of the war,
But I saw they were not as was thought,
They themselves were fully at rest, they suffer'd not,
The living remain'd and suffer'd, the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and child and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

Passing the visions, passing the night,
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands,
Passing the song of the hermit bird and the tallying song of my soul,
Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying ever-altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth and filling the spread of the heaven,
As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,
Passing, I leave thee lilac with heart-shaped leaves,
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring.

I cease from my song for thee,
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous with silver face in the night.

Yet each to keep and all, retrievements out of the night,
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,

With the lustrous and drooping star with the countenance full of woe,
With the holders holding my hand nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine and I in the midst, and their memory ever to keep, for the dead I loved so well,
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands—and this for his dear sake,
Lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines and the cedars dusk and dim.

O CAPTAIN! MY CAPTAIN!

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

HUSH'D BE THE CAMPS TO-DAY

Hush'd be the camps to-day,
And soldiers let us drape our war-worn weapons,
And each with musing soul retire to celebrate,
Our dear commander's death.

No more for him life's stormy conflicts,
Nor victory, nor defeat—no more time's dark events,
Charging like ceaseless clouds across the sky.

But sing poet in our name,
Sing of the love we bore him—because you, dweller in camps, know it truly.

As they invault the coffin there,
Sing—as they close the doors of earth upon him—one verse,
For the heavy hearts of soldiers.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

August 12th [1863]—I see the President almost every day, as I happen to live where he passes to or from his lodgings out of town. He never sleeps at the White House during the hot season, but has quarters at a healthy location some three miles north of the city, the Soldiers' home, a United States military establishment. I saw him this morning about 8½ coming in to business, riding on Vermont avenue, near L street. He always has a company of twenty-five or thirty cavalry, with sabres drawn and held upright over their shoulders. They say this guard was against his personal wish, but he let his counselors have their way. The party makes no great show in uniform or horses. Mr. Lincoln on the saddle generally rides a good-sized, easy-going gray horse, is dress'd in plain black, somewhat rusty and dusty, wears a black stiff hat, and looks about as ordinary in attire, etc., as the commonest man. A lieutenant, with yellow straps, rides at his left, and following behind, two by two, come the cavalry men,

in their yellow-striped jackets. They are generally going at a slow trot, as that is the pace set them by the one they wait upon. The sabres and accoutrements clank, and the entirely unornamental *cortège* as it trots toward Lafayette square arouses no sensation, only some curious stranger stops and gazes. I see very plainly ABRAHAM LINCOLN's dark brown face, with the deep-cut lines, the eyes, always to me with a deep latent sadness in the expression. We have got so that we exchange bows, and very cordial ones. Sometimes the President goes and comes in an open barouche. The cavalry always accompany him, with drawn sabres. Often I notice as he goes out evenings—and sometimes in the morning, when he returns early—he turns off and halts at the large and handsome residence of the Secretary of War, on K street, and holds conference there. If in his barouche, I can see from my window he does not alight, but sits in his vehicle, and Mr. Stanton comes out to attend him. Sometimes one of his sons, a boy of ten or twelve, accompanies him, riding at his right on a pony. Earlier in the summer I occasionally saw the President and his wife, toward the latter part of the afternoon, out in a barouche, on a pleasure ride through the city. Mrs. Lincoln was dress'd in complete black, with a long crape veil. The equipage is of the plainest kind, only two horses, and they nothing extra. They pass'd me once very close, and I saw the President in the face fully, as they were moving slowly, and his look, though abstracted, happen'd to be directed steadily in my eye. He bow'd and smiled, but far beneath his smile I noticed well the expression I have alluded to. None of the artists or pictures has caught the deep, though subtle and indirect expression of this man's face. There is something else there. One of the great portrait painters of two or three centuries ago is needed.

THE MARTYR CHIEF

Nor will ever future American Patriots and Unionists, indifferently over the whole land, or North or South, find a better moral to their lesson. The final use of the greatest men of a Nation is, after all, not with reference to their deeds in them-

selves, or their direct bearing on their times or lands. The final use of a heroic-eminent life—especially of a heroic-eminent death —is its indirect filtering into the nation and the race, and to give, often at many removes, but unerringly, age after age, color and fibre to the personalism of the youth and maturity of that age, and of mankind. Then there is a cement to the whole people, subtler, more underlying, than any thing in written constitution, or courts or armies—namely, the cement of a death identified thoroughly with that people, at its head, and for its sake. Strange, (is it not?) that battles, martyrs, agonies, blood, even assassination, should so condense—perhaps only really lastingly condense—a Nationality.

I repeat it—the grand deaths of the race—the dramatic deaths of every nationality—are its most important inheritance-value—in some respects beyond its literature and art—(as the hero is beyond his finest portrait, and the battle itself beyond its choicest song or epic.) Is not here indeed the point underlying all tragedy? the famous pieces of the Grecian masters—and all masters? Why, if the old Greeks had had this man, what trilogies of plays —what epics—would have been made out of him! How the rhapsodes would have recited him! How quickly that quaint tall form would have enter'd into the region where men vitalize gods, and gods divinify men! But Lincoln, his times, his death—great as any, any age—belong altogether to our own, and our autochthonic. (Sometimes indeed I think our American days, our own stage—the actors we know and have shaken hands, or talk'd with—more fateful than any thing in Eschylus—more heroic than the fighters around Troy—afford kings of men for our Democracy prouder than Agamemnon—models of character cute and hardy as Ulysses—deaths more pitiful than Priam's.)

When, centuries hence, (as it must, in my opinion, be centuries hence before the life of these States, or of Democracy, can be really written and illustrated,) the leading historians and dramatists seek for some personage, some special event, incisive enough to mark with deepest cut, and mnemonize, this turbulent Nineteenth century of ours, (not only these States, but all over the political and social world)—something, perhaps, to close that gorgeous procession of European feudalism, with all its pomp

and caste-prejudices, (of whose long train we in America are yet so inextricably the heirs)—something to identify with terrible identification, by far the greatest revolutionary step in the history of the United States, (perhaps the greatest of the world, our century)—the absolute extirpation and erasure of slavery from the States—those historians will seek in vain for any point to serve more thoroughly their purpose, than Abraham Lincoln's death.

Dear to the Muse—thrice dear to Nationality—to the whole human race—precious to this Union—precious to Democracy—unspeakably and forever precious—their first great Martyr Chief.

—From *Death of Abraham Lincoln*

"Without yielding an inch the working-man and working-woman were to be in my pages from first to last."

7. *The Laboring Masses*

A SONG FOR OCCUPATIONS

A song for occupations!
In the labor of engines and trades and the labor of fields I find the developments,
And find the eternal meanings.
Workmen and Workwomen!
Were all educations practical and ornamental well display'd out of me, what would it amount to?
Were I as the head teacher, charitable proprietor, wise statesman, what would it amount to?
Were I to you as the boss employing and paying you, would that satisfy you?

The learn'd, virtuous, benevolent, and the usual terms,
A man like me and never the usual terms.

Neither a servant nor a master I,
I take no sooner a large price than a small price, I will have my own whoever enjoys me,
I will be even with you and you shall be even with me.

If you stand at work in a shop I stand as nigh as the nighest in the same shop,
If you bestow gifts on your brother or dearest friend I demand as good as your brother or dearest friend,
If your lover, husband, wife, is welcome by day or night, I must be personally as welcome,
If you become degraded, criminal, ill, then I become so for your sake,

If you remember your foolish and outlaw'd deeds, do you think
I cannot remember my own foolish and outlaw'd deeds?
If you carouse at the table I carouse at the opposite side of the
table,
If you meet some stranger in the streets and love him or her, why
I often meet strangers in the street and love them.

Why what have you thought of yourself?
Is it you then that thought yourself less?
Is it you that thought the President greater than you?
Or the rich better off than you? or the educated wiser than you?

(Because you are greasy or pimpled, or were once drunk, or a
thief,
Or that you are diseas'd, or rheumatic, or a prostitute,
Or from frivolity or impotence, or that you are no scholar and
never saw your name in print,
Do you give in that you are any less immortal?)

Souls of men and women! it is not you I call unseen, unheard,
untouchable and untouching,
It is not you I go argue pro and con about, and to settle whether
you are alive or no,
I own publicly who you are, if nobody else owns.

Grown, half-grown and babe, of this country and every country,
in-doors and out-doors, one just as much as the other, I see,
And all else behind or through them.

The wife, and she is not one jot less than the husband,
The daughter, and she is just as good as the son,
The mother, and she is every bit as much as the father.

Offspring of ignorant and poor, boys apprenticed to trades,
Young fellows working on farms and old fellows working on
farms,
Sailor-men, merchant-men, coasters, immigrants,
All these I see, but nigher and farther the same I see,
None shall escape me and none shall wish to escape me.

I bring what you much need yet always have,
Not money, amours, dress, eating, erudition, but as good,
I send no agent or medium, offer no representative of value, but offer the value itself.

There is something that comes to one now and perpetually,
It is not what is printed, preach'd, discussed, it eludes discussion and print,
It is not to be put in a book, it is not in this book,
It is for you whoever you are, it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are from you,
It is hinted by nearest, commonest, readiest, it is ever provoked by them.

You may read in many languages, yet read nothing about it,
You may read the President's message and read nothing about it there,
Nothing in the reports from the State department or Treasury department, or in the daily papers or weekly papers,
Or in the census or revenue returns, prices current, or any accounts of stocks.

The sun and stars that float in the open air,
The apple-shaped earth and we upon it, surely the drift of them is something grand,
I do not know what it is except that it is grand, and that it is happiness,
And that the enclosing purport of us here is not a speculation or bon-mot of reconnaissance,
And that it is not something which by luck may turn out well for us, and without luck must be a failure for us,
And not something which may yet be retracted in a certain contingency.

The light and shade, the curious sense of body and identity, the greed that with perfect complaisance devours all things,
The endless pride and outstretching of man, unspeakable joys and sorrows,

The wonder every one sees in every one else he sees, and the wonders that fill each minute of time forever,
What have you reckon'd them for, camerado?
Have you reckon'd them for your trade or farm-work? or for the profits of your store?
Or to achieve yourself a position? or to fill a gentleman's leisure, or a lady's leisure?

Have you reckon'd that the landscape took substance and form that it might be painted in a picture?
Or men and women that they might be written of, and songs sung?
Or the attraction of gravity, and the great laws and harmonious combinations and the fluids of the air, as subjects for the savans?
Or the brown land and the blue sea for maps and charts?
Or the stars to be put in constellations and named fancy names?
Or that the growth of seeds is for agricultural tables, or agriculture itself?

Old institutions, these arts, libraries, legends, collections, and the practice handed along in manufactures, will we rate them so high?
Will we rate our cash and business high? I have no objection,
I rate them as high as the highest—then a child born of a woman and man I rate beyond all rate.

We thought our Union grand, and our Constitution grand,
I do not say they are not grand and good, for they are,
I am this day just as much in love with them as you,
Then I am in love with You, and with all my fellows upon the earth.

We consider bibles and religions divine—I do not say they are not divine,
I say they have all grown out of you, and may grow out of you still,
It is not they who give the life, it is you who give the life,
Leaves are not more shed from the trees, or trees from the earth, than they are shed out of you.

The sum of all known reverence I add up in you whoever you are,
The President is there in the White House for you, it is not you who are here for him,
The Secretaries act in their bureaus for you, not you here for them,
The Congress convenes every Twelfth-month for you,
Laws, courts, the forming of States, the charters of cities, the going and coming of commerce and mails, are all for you.

List close my scholars dear,
Doctrines, politics and civilization exurge from you,
Sculpture and monuments and any thing inscribed anywhere are tallied in you,
The gist of histories and statistics as far back as the records reach is in you this hour, and myths and tales the same,
If you were not breathing and walking here, where would they all be?
The most renown'd poems would be ashes, orations and plays would be vacuums.

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it,
(Did you think it was in the white or gray stone? or the lines of the arches and cornices?)

All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments,
It is not the violins and the cornets, it is not the oboe nor the beating drums, nor the score of the baritone singer singing his sweet romanza, nor that of the men's chorus, nor that of the women's chorus,
It is nearer and farther than they.

Will the whole come back then?
Can each see signs of the best by a look in the looking-glass? is there nothing greater or more?
Does all sit there with you, with the mystic unseen soul?

Strange and hard that paradox true I give,
Objects gross and the unseen soul are one.

House-building, measuring, sawing the boards,
Blacksmithing, glass-blowing, nail-making, coopering, tin-roofing, shingle-dressing,
Ship-joining, dock-building, fish-curing, flagging of sidewalks by flaggers,
The pump, the pile-driver, the great derrick, the coal-kiln and brick-kiln,
Coal-mines and all that is down there, the lamps in the darkness, echoes, songs, what meditations, what vast native thoughts looking through smutch'd faces,
Iron-works, forge-fires in the mountains or by river-banks, men around feeling the melt with huge crowbars, lumps of ore, the due combining of ore, limestone, coal,
The blast-furnace and the puddling-furnace, the loup-lump at the bottom of the melt at last, the rolling-mill, the stumpy bars of pig-iron, the strong clean-shaped T-rail for railroads,
Oil-works, silk-works, white-lead-works, the sugar-house, steam-saws, the great mills and factories,
Stone-cutting, shapely trimmings for façades or window or door-lintels, the mallet, the tooth-chisel, the jib to protect the thumb,
The calking-iron, the kettle of boiling vault-cement, and the fire under the kettle,
The cotton-bale, the stevedore's hook, the saw and buck of the sawyer, the mould of the moulder, the working-knife of the butcher, the ice-saw, and all the work with ice,
The work and tools of the rigger, grappler, sail-maker, block-maker,
Goods of gutta-percha, papier-maché, colors, brushes, brush-making, glazier's implements,
The veneer and glue-pot, the confectioner's ornaments, the decanter and glasses, the shears and flat-iron,
The awl and knee-strap, the pint measure and quart measure, the counter and stool, the writing-pen of quill or metal, the making of all sorts of edged tools,

The brewery, brewing, the malt, the vats, every thing that is done by brewers, wine-makers, vinegar-makers,
Leather-dressing, coach-making, boiler-making, rope-twisting, distilling, sign-painting, lime-burning, cotton-picking, electroplating, electrotyping, stereotyping,
Stave-machines, planing-machines, reaping-machines, ploughing-machines, thrashing-machines, steam wagons,
The cart of the carman, the omnibus, the ponderous dray,
Pyrotechny, letting off color'd fireworks at night, fancy figures and jets;
Beef on the butcher's stall, the slaughter-house of the butcher, the butcher in his killing-clothes,
The pens of live pork, the killing-hammer, the hog-hook, the scalder's tub, gutting, the cutter's cleaver, the packer's maul, and the plenteous winterwork of pork-packing,
Flour-works, grinding of wheat, rye, maize, rice, the barrels and the half and quarter barrels, the loaded barges, the high piles on wharves and levees,
The men and the work of the men on ferries, railroads, coasters, fish-boats, canals;
The hourly routine of your own or any man's life, the shop, yard, store, or factory,
These shows all near you by day and night—workman! whoever you are, your daily life!
In that and them the heft of the heaviest—in that and them far more than you estimated, (and far less also,)
In them realities for you and me, in them poems for you and me,
In them, not yourself—you and your soul enclose all things, regardless of estimation,
In them the development good—in them all themes, hints, possibilities.

I do not affirm that what you see beyond is futile, I do not advise you to stop,
I do not say leadings you thought great are not great,
But I say that none lead to greater than these lead to.

Will you seek afar off? you surely come back at last,
In things best known to you finding the best, or as good as the best,
In folks nearest to you finding the sweetest, strongest, lovingest,
Happiness, knowledge, not in another place but this place, not for another hour but this hour,
Man in the first you see or touch, always in friend, brother, nighest neighbor—woman in mother, sister, wife,
The popular tastes and employments taking precedence in poems or anywhere,
You workwomen and workmen of these States having your own divine and strong life,
And all else giving place to men and women like you.

When the psalm sings instead of the singer,
When the script preaches instead of the preacher,
When the pulpit descends and goes instead of the carver that carved the supporting desk,
When I can touch the body of books by night or by day, and when they touch my body back again,
When a university course convinces like a slumbering woman and child convince,
When the minted gold in the vault smiles like the night-watchman's daughter,
When warrantee deeds loafe in chairs opposite and are my friendly companions,
I intend to reach them my hand, and make as much of them as I do of men and women like you.

I SIT AND LOOK OUT

I sit and look out upon all the sorrows of the world, and upon all oppression and shame,
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done,
I see in low life the mother misused by her children, dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate,

I see the wife misused by her husband, I see the treacherous seducer of young women,
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love attempted to be hid, I see these sights on the earth,
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny, I see martyrs and prisoners,
I observe a famine at sea, I observe the sailors casting lots who shall be kill'd to preserve the lives of the rest,
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant persons upon laborers, the poor, and upon Negroes, and the like;
All these—all the meanness and agony without end I sitting look out upon,
See, hear, and am silent.

SONG OF THE BROAD-AXE

... The log at the wood-pile, the axe supported by it,
The sylvan hut, the vine over the doorway, the space clear'd for a garden,
The irregular tapping of rain down on the leaves after the storm is lull'd,
The wailing and moaning at intervals, the thought of the sea,
The thought of ships struck in the storm and put on their beam ends, and the cutting away of masts,
The sentiment of the huge timbers of old-fashion'd houses and barns,
The remember'd print of narrative, the voyage at a venture of men, families, goods,
The disembarkation, the founding of a new city,
The voyage of those who sought a New England and found it, the outset anywhere,
The settlements of the Arkansas, Colorado, Ottawa, Willamette.
The slow progress, the scant fare, the axe, rifle, saddle-bags;
The beauty of all adventurous and daring persons,
The beauty of wood-boys and wood-men with their clear untrimm'd faces,
The beauty of independence, departure, actions that rely on themselves,

The American contempt for statutes and ceremonies, the boundless impatience of restraint,
The loose drift of character, the inkling through random types, the solidification;
The butcher in the slaughter-house, the hands aboard schooners and sloops, the raftsman, the pioneer,
Lumbermen in their winter camp, daybreak in the woods, stripes of snow on the limbs of trees, the occasional snapping,
The glad clear sound of one's own voice, the merry song, the natural life of the woods, the strong day's work,
The blazing fire at night, the sweet taste of supper, the talk, the bed of hemlock-boughs and the bear-skin;
The house-builder at work in cities or anywhere,
The preparatory jointing, squaring, sawing, mortising,
The hoist-up of beams, the push of them in their places, laying them regular,
Setting the studs by their tenons in the mortises according as they were prepared,
The blows of mallets and hammers, the attitudes of the men, their curv'd limbs,
Bending, standing, astride the beams, driving in pins, holding on by posts and braces,
The hook'd arm over the plate, the other arm wielding the axe,
The floor-men forcing the planks close to be nail'd,
Their postures bringing their weapons downward on the bearers,
The echoes resounding through the vacant building;
The huge storehouse carried up in the city well under way,
The six framing-men, two in the middle and two at each end, carefully bearing on their shoulders a heavy stick for a cross-beam,
The crowded line of masons with trowels in their right hands rapidly laying the long side-wall, two hundred feet from front to rear,
The flexible rise and fall of backs, the continual click of the trowels striking the bricks,
The bricks one after another each laid so workmanlike in its place and set with a knock of the trowel-handle,

The piles of materials, the mortar on the mortar-boards, and the steady replenishing by the hod-men;
Spar-makers in the spar-yard, the swarming row of well-grown apprentices,
The swing of their axes on the square-hew'd log shaping it toward the shape of a mast,
The brisk short crackle of the steel driven slantingly into the pine,
The butter-color'd chips flying off in great flakes and slivers,
The limber motion of brawny young arms and hips in easy costumes,
The constructor of wharves, bridges, piers, bulk-heads, floats, stays against the sea;
The city fireman, the fire that suddenly bursts forth in the close-pack'd square,
The arriving engines, the hoarse shouts, the nimble stepping and daring,
The strong command through the fire-trumpets, the falling in line, the rise and fall of the arms forcing the water,
The slender, spasmic, blue-white jets, the bringing to bear of the hooks and ladders and their execution,
The crash and cut away of connecting wood-work, or through floors if the fire smoulders under them,
The crowd with their lit faces watching, the glare and dense shadows;
The forger at his forge-furnace and the user of iron after him....

What do you think endures?
Do you think a great city endures?
Or a teeming manufacturing state? or a prepared constitution? or the best built steamships?
Or hotels of granite and iron? or any chef-d'œuvres of engineering, forts, armaments?

Away! these are not to be cherish'd for themselves,
They fill their hour, the dancers dance, the musicians play for them,
The show passes, all does well enough of course,
All does very well till one flash of defiance.

A great city is that which has the greatest men and women,
If it be a few ragged huts it is still the greatest city in the whole world.

The place where a great city stands is not the place of stretch'd wharves, docks, manufactures, deposits of produce merely,
Nor the place of ceaseless salutes of new-comers or the anchor-lifters of the departing,
Nor the place of the tallest and costliest buildings or shops selling goods from the rest of the earth,
Nor the place of the best libraries and schools, nor the place where money is plentiest,
Nor the place of the most numerous population.

Where the city stands with the brawniest breed of orators and bards,
Where the city stands that is belov'd by these, and loves them in return and understands them,
Where no monuments exist to heroes but in the common words and deeds,
Where thrift is in its place, and prudence is in its place,
Where the men and women think lightly of the laws,
Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases,
Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons,
Where fierce men and women pour forth as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unript waves,
Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority,
Where the citizen is always the head and ideal, and President, Mayor, Governor and what not, are agents for pay,
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves,
Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs,
Where speculations on the soul are encouraged,
Where women walk in public processions in the streets the same as the men,

Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men;
Where the city of the faithfulest friends stand,
Where the city of the cleanliness of the sexes stands,
Where the city of the healthiest fathers stands,
Where the city of the best-bodied mothers stands,
There the great city stands....

I DREAM'D IN A DREAM

I dream'd in a dream I saw a city invincible to the attacks of the whole of the rest of the earth,
I dream'd that was the new city of Friends,
Nothing was greater there than the quality of robust love, it led the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the men of that city,
And in all their looks and words.

THE TRAMP AND STRIKE QUESTIONS

Part of a Lecture proposed, (never deliver'd)

Two grim and spectral dangers—dangerous to peace, to health, to social security, to progress—long known in concrete to the governments of the Old World, and there eventuating, more than once or twice, in dynastic overturns, bloodshed, days, months, of terror—seem of late years to be nearing the New World, nay, to be gradually establishing themselves among us. What mean these phantoms here? (I personify them in fictitious shapes, but they are very real.) Is the fresh and broad demesne of America destined also to give them foothold and lodgment, permanent domicile?

Beneath the whole political world, what most presses and perplexes to-day, sending vastest results affecting the future, is not the abstract question of democracy, but of social and economic organization, the treatment of working-people by employers, and

all that goes along with it—not only the wages-payment part, but a certain spirit and principle, to vivify anew these relations; all the questions of progress, strength, tariffs, finance, etc., really evolving themselves more or less directly out of the Poverty Question, ("the Science of Wealth," and a dozen other names are given it, but I prefer the severe one just used.) I will begin by calling the reader's attention to a thought upon the matter which may not have struck you before—the wealth of the civilized world, as contrasted with its poverty—what does it derivatively stand for, and represent? A rich person ought to have a strong stomach. As in Europe the wealth of to-day mainly results from, and represents, the rapine, murder, outrages, treachery, hoggishness, of hundreds of years ago, and onward, later, so in America, after the same token—(not yet so bad, perhaps, or at any rate not so palpable—we have not existed long enough—but we seem to be doing our best to make it up.)

Curious as it may seem, it is in what are call'd the poorest, lowest characters you will sometimes, nay generally, find glints of the most sublime virtues, eligibilities, heroisms. Then it is doubtful whether the State is to be saved, either in the monotonous long run, or in tremendous special crises, by its good people only. When the storm is deadliest, and the disease most imminent, help often comes from strange quarters—(the homœopathic motto, you remember, *cure the bite with a hair of the same dog.*)

The American Revolution of 1776 was simply a great strike, successful for its immediate object—but whether a real success judged by the scale of the centuries, and the long-striking balance of Time, yet remains to be settled. The French Revolution was absolutely a strike, and a very terrible and relentless one, against ages of bad pay, unjust division of wealth-products, and the hoggish monopoly of a few, rolling in superfluity, against the vast bulk of the work-people, living in squalor.

If the United States, like the countries of the Old World, are also to grow vast crops of poor, desperate, dissatisfied, nomadic, miserably-waged populations, such as we see looming upon us of late years—steadily, even if slowly, eating into them like a cancer of lungs or stomach—then our republican experiment, not-

withstanding all its surface-successes, is at heart an unhealthy failure.

February '79.—I saw to-day a sight I had never seen before—and it amazed, and made me serious; three quite good-looking American men, of respectable personal presence, two of them young, carrying chiffonier-bags on their shoulders, and the usual long iron hooks in their hands, plodding along, their eyes cast down, spying for scraps, rags, bones, etc.

THE MAGICIAN'S SERPENT

For my part, I would alarm and caution even the political and business reader, and to the utmost extent, against the prevailing delusion that the establishment of free political institutions, and plentiful intellectual smartness, with general good order, physical plenty, industry, etc., (desirable and precious advantages as they all are,) do, of themselves, determine and yield to our experiment of democracy the fruitage of success. With such advantages at present fully, or almost fully, possess'd—the Union just issued, victorious, from the struggle with the only foes it need ever fear, (namely, those within itself, the interior ones,) and with unprecedented materialistic advancement—society, in these States, is canker'd, crude, superstitious, and rotten. Political, or law-made society is, and private, or voluntary society, is also. In any vigor, the element of the moral conscience, the most important, the verteber to State or man seems to me either entirely lacking, or seriously enfeebled or ungrown.

I say we had best look our times and lands searchingly in the face, like a physician diagnosing some deep disease. Never was there, perhaps, more hollowness at heart than at present, and here in the United States. Genuine belief seems to have left us. The underlying principles of the States are not honestly believ'd in, (for all this hectic glow, and these melo-dramatic screamings,) nor is humanity itself believ'd in. What penetrating eye does not everywhere see through the mask? The spectacle is appalling. We live in an atmosphere of hypocrisy throughout. The men believe not in the women, nor the women in the men. A scornful

superciliousness rules in literature. The aim of all the *littérateurs* is to find something to make fun of. A lot of churches, sects, etc., the most dismal phantasms I know, usurp the name of religion. Conversation is a mass of badinage. From deceit in the spirit, the mother of all false deeds, the offspring is already incalculable. An acute and candid person, in the revenue department in Washington, who is led by the course of his employment to regularly visit the cities, north, south and west, to investigate frauds, has talk'd much with me about his discoveries. The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, maladministration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with respectable as much as non-respectable robbery and scoundrelism. In fashionable life, flippancy, tepid amours, weak infidelism, small aims, or no aims at all, only to kill time. In business, (this all-devouring modern word, business,) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. The best class we show, is but a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians. True, indeed, behind this fantastic farce, enacted on the visible stage of society, solid things and stupendous labors are to be discover'd, existing crudely and going on in the background, to advance and tell themselves in time. Yet the truths are none the less terrible. I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results. In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome. In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast

and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul.

Let me illustrate further, as I write, with current observations, localities, etc. The subject is important, and will bear repetition. After an absence, I am now again (September, 1870) in New York City and Brooklyn, on a few weeks' vacation. The splendor, picturesqueness, and oceanic amplitude and rush of these great cities, the unsurpass'd situation, rivers and bay, sparkling sea-tides, costly and lofty new buildings, façades of marble and iron, of original grandeur and elegance of design, with the masses of gay color, the preponderance of white and blue, the flags flying, the endless ships, the tumultuous streets, Broadway, the heavy, low, musical roar, hardly ever intermitted, even at night; the jobbers' houses, the rich shops, the wharves, the great Central Park, and the Brooklyn Park of hills, (as I wander among them this beautiful fall weather, musing, watching, absorbing)—the assemblages of the citizens in their groups, conversations, trades, evening amusements, or along the by-quarters —these I say, and the like of these, completely satisfy my senses of power, fulness, motion, etc., and give me, through such senses and appetites, and through my esthetic conscience, a continued exaltation and absolute fulfillment. Always and more and more, as I cross the East and North rivers, the ferries, or with the pilots in their pilot-houses, or pass an hour in Wall street, or the gold exchange, I realize, (if we must admit such partialisms,) that not Nature alone is great in her fields of freedom and the open air, in her storms, the shows of night and day, the mountains, forests, seas—but in the artificial, the work of man too is equally great—in this profusion of teeming humanity—in these ingenuities, streets, goods, houses, ships—these hurrying, feverish, electric crowds of men, their complicated business genius, (not least among the geniuses,) and all this mighty, many-threaded wealth and industry concentrated here.

—From *Democratic Vistas*

OUR HIGHEST THEMES

The employment and personnel of mechanics, farmers, boatmen laborers, and men and women in factories, must be seized upon with decision by America's bards, to be by them saturated with fullest charges of electric illumination, and to be held up forever with enthusiasm and dignity. Our highest themes are things at hand. Current, practical times are to be photographed, embracing the war, commerce, inventions, Washington, Abraham Lincoln, the mechanics, and the great work now going on, the settlement of this Western World, the great railroads, &c,—embracing indeed the races and locations of the whole world....

—From *Walt Whitman's Workshop*

"... my dearest dream is for an internationality of poems and poets, binding the lands of the earth closer than all treaties and diplomacy...."

8. *Salute to the World*

FRANCE

The 18th Year of these States

A great year and place,
A harsh discordant natal scream out-sounding, to touch the mother's heart closer than any yet.
I walk'd the shores of my Eastern sea,
Heard over the waves the little voice,
Saw the divine infant where she woke mournfully wailing, amid the roar of cannon, curses, shouts, crash of falling buildings,
Was not so sick from the blood in the gutters running, nor from the single corpses, nor those in heaps, nor those borne away in the tumbrils,
Was not so desperate at the battues of death—was not so shock'd at the repeated fusillades of the guns.

Pale, silent, stern, what could I say to that long-accrued retribution?
Could I wish humanity different?
Could I wish the people made of wood and stone?
Or that there be no justice in destiny or time?

O Liberty! O mate for me!
Here too the blaze, the grape-shot and the axe, in reserve, to fetch them out in case of need,
Here too, though long represt, can never be destroy'd,
Here too could rise at last murdering and ecstatic,
Here too demanding full arrears of vengeance.

Hence I sign this salute over the sea,
And I do not deny that terrible red birth and baptism,
But remember the little voice that I heard wailing, and wait with perfect trust, no matter how long,
And from to-day sad and cogent I maintain the bequeath'd cause, as for all lands,
And I send these words to Paris with my love,
And I guess some chansonniers there will understand them,
For I guess there is latent music yet in France, floods of it,
O I hear already the bustle of instruments, they will soon be drowning all that would interrupt them,
O I think the east wind brings a triumphal and free march,
It reaches hither, it swells me to joyful madness,
I will run transpose it in words, to justify it,
I will yet sing a song for you ma femme.

EUROPE

The 72nd and 73rd Years of These States

Suddenly out of its stale and drowsy lair, the lair of slaves,
Like lightning it le'pt forth half startled at itself,
Its feet upon the ashes and the rags, its hands tight to the throats of kings.

O hope and faith!
O aching close of exiled patriots' lives!
O many a sicken'd heart!
Turn back unto this day and make yourselves afresh.

And you, paid to defile the People—you liars, mark!
Not for numberless agonies, murders, lusts,
For court thieving in its manifold mean forms, worming from his simplicity the poor man's wages,
For many a promise sworn by royal lips and broken and laugh'd at in the breaking,
Then in their power not for all these did the blows strike revenge, or the heads of the nobles fall;
The People scorn'd the ferocity of kings.

But the sweetness of mercy brew'd bitter destruction and the frighten'd monarchs come back,
Each comes in state with his train, hangman, priest, tax-gatherer,
Soldier, lawyer, lord, jailer, and sycophant.

Yet behind all lowering stealing, lo, a shape,
Vague as the night, draped interminably, head, front and form, in scarlet folds,
Whose face and eyes none may see,
Out of its robes only this, the red robes lifted by the arm,
One finger crook'd pointed high over the top, like the head of a snake appears.

Meanwhile corpses lie in new-made graves, bloody corpses of young men,
The rope of the gibbet hangs heavily, the bullets of princes are flying, the creatures of power laugh aloud,
And all these things bear fruits, and they are good.

Those corpses of young men,
Those martyrs that hang from the gibbets, those hearts pierc'd by the gray lead,
Cold and motionless as they seem live elsewhere with unslaughter'd vitality.

They live in other young men O kings!
They live in brothers again ready to defy you,
They were purified by death, they were taught and exalted.

Not a grave of the murder'd for freedom but grows seed for freedom, in its turn to bear seed,
Which the winds carry afar and re-sow, and the rains and the snows nourish.

Not a disembodied spirit can the weapons of tyrants let loose,
But it stalks invisibly over the earth, whispering, counseling, cautioning.

Liberty, let others despair of you—I never despair of you.

Is the house shut? is the master away?
Nevertheless, be ready, be not weary of watching,
He will soon return, his messengers come anon.

TO A FOIL'D EUROPEAN REVOLUTIONAIRE

Courage yet, my brother or my sister!
Keep on—Liberty is to be subserv'd whatever occurs;
That is nothing that is quell'd by one or two failures, or any number of failures,
Or by the indifference or ingratitude of the people, or by any unfaithfulness,
Or the show of the tushes of power, soldiers, cannon, penal statutes.

What we believe in waits latent forever through all the continents,
Invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, knows no discouragement,
Waiting patiently, waiting its time.

(Not songs of loyalty alone are these,
But songs of insurrection also,
For I am the sworn poet of every dauntless rebel the world over,
And he going with me leaves peace and routine behind him,
And stakes his life to be lost at any moment.)

The battle rages with many a loud alarm and frequent advance and retreat,
The infidel triumphs, or supposes he triumphs,
The prison, scaffold, garroté, handcuffs, iron necklace and lead-balls do their work,
The named and unnamed heroes pass to other spheres,
The great speakers and writers are exiled, they lie sick in distant lands,
The cause is asleep, the strongest throats are choked with their own blood,

The young men droop their eyelashes toward the ground when they meet;
But for all this Liberty has not gone out of the place, nor the infidel enter'd into full possession.

When liberty goes out of a place it is not the first to go, nor the second or third to go,
It waits for all the rest to go, it is the last.

When there are no more memories of heroes and martyrs,
And when all life and all the souls of men and women are discharged from any part of the earth,
Then only shall liberty or the idea of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth,
And the infidel come into full possession.

Then courage European revolter, revoltress!
For till all ceases neither must you cease.

I do not know what you are for, (I do not know what I am for myself, nor what any thing is for,)
But I will search carefully for it even in being foil'd,
In defeat, poverty, misconception, imprisonment—for they too are great.

Did we think victory great?
So it is—but now it seems to me, when it cannot be help'd, that defeat is great,
And that death and dismay are great.

O STAR OF FRANCE

1870-71

O star of France,
The brightness of thy hope and strength and fame,
Like some proud ship that led the fleet so long,
Beseems to-day a wreck driven by the gale, a mastless hulk,
And 'mid its teeming madden'd half-drown'd crowds,
Nor helm nor helmsman.

Dim smitten star,
Orb not of France alone, pale symbol of my soul, its dearest hopes,
The struggle and the daring, rage divine for liberty,
Of aspirations toward the far ideal, enthusiast's dreams of brotherhood,
Of terror to the tyrant and the priest.

Star crucified—by traitors sold,
Star panting o'er a land of death, heroic land,
Strange, passionate, mocking, frivolous land.

Miserable! yet for thy errors, vanities, sins, I will not now rebuke thee,
Thy unexampled woes and pangs have quell'd them all,
And left thee sacred.

In that amid thy many faults thou ever aimedst highly,
In that thou wouldst not really sell thyself however great the price,
In that thou surely wakedst weeping from thy drugg'd sleep,
In that alone among thy sisters thou, giantess, didst rend the ones that shamed thee,
In that thou couldst not, wouldst not, wear the usual chains,
This cross, thy livid face, thy pierced hands and feet,
The spear thrust in thy side.

O star! O ship of France, beat back and baffled long!
Bear up O smitten orb! O ship continue on!

Sure as the ship of all, the Earth itself,
Product of deathly fire and turbulent chaos,
Forth from its spasms of fury and its poisons,
Issuing at last in perfect power and beauty,
Onward beneath the sun following its course,
So thee O ship of France!
Finish'd the days, the clouds dispel'd,
The travail o'er, the long-sought extrication,

When lo! reborn, high o'er the European world,
(In gladness answering thence, as face afar to face, reflecting ours Columbia,)
Again thy star O France, fair lustrous star,
In heavenly peace, clearer, more bright than ever,
Shall beam immortal.

SPAIN, 1873-74

Out of the murk of heaviest clouds,
Out of the feudal wrecks and heap'd-up skeletons of kings,
Out of that old entire European debris, the shatter'd mummeries,
Ruin'd cathedrals, crumble of palaces, tombs of priests,
Lo, Freedom's features fresh undimm'd look forth—the same immortal face looks forth;
(A glimpse as of thy Mother's face Columbia,
A flash significant as of a sword,
Beaming towards thee.)

Nor think we forget thee maternal;
Lag'd'st thou so long? shall the clouds close again upon thee?
Ah, but thou hast thyself now appear'd to us—we know thee,
Thou hast given us a sure proof, the glimpse of thyself,
Thou waitest there as everywhere thy time.

BARDS OF ADHESIVENESS

Though there is many another influence and chord in the intentions of the following Recitatives, the one that for the purpose of this reprint doubtless o'erdominates the rest is to suggest and help a deeper, stronger, (not now political, or business, or intellectual, but) heroic, artistic, and especially emotional, intertwining and affiliation of the Old and New Worlds.

Indeed, the peculiar glory of These United States I have come to see, or expect to see, not in their geographical or even republican greatness, nor wealth or products, nor military or naval

power, nor special, eminent Names in any department, (to shine with, or outshine, foreign special names, in similar departments,)—but more and more in a vaster, saner, more splendid COMRADESHIP, typifying the People everywhere, uniting closer and closer not only The American States, but all Nations, and all Humanity. (That, O Poets! is not *that* a theme, a Union, worth chanting, striving for? Why not fix our verses henceforth to the gauge of the round globe? the whole race?)

Perhaps the most illustrious culmination of the Modern and of Republicanism may prove to be a signal cluster of joyous, more exalted Bards of Adhesiveness, identically one in soul, but contributed by every nation, each after its distinctive kind. Let me dare here and now to start it. Let the diplomats, as ever, still deeply plan, seeking advantages, proposing treaties between governments, and to bind them, on paper: what I seek is different, simpler. I would inaugurate from America, for this purpose, new formulas, international poems. I have thought that the invisible root out of which the Poetry deepest in, and dearest to, humanity grows, is Friendship. I have thought that both in Patriotism and Song, (even amid their grandest shows, past,) we have adhered too long to petty limits, and that the time has come to enfold the world.

—From *Walt Whitman's Workshop*

TO THE FOREIGN READER

While my pieces, then, were put forth and sounded especially for my own country, and addressed to democratic needs, I cannot evade the conviction that the substances and subtle ties behind them, and which they celebrate, (is it that the American character has enormous Pride and Self-assertion? aye, but underneath, living Good-will and Sympathy, on which the others rest, are far more enormous,) belong equally to all countries. And the ambition to waken with them, and in their key, the latest echoes of every land, I here avow.

To begin, therefore, though nor envoy, nor ambassador, nor with any official right, nor commission'd by the President—with

only Poet's right, as general simple friend of Man—the right of the Singer, admitted, all ranks, all times—I will not repress the impulse I feel, (what is it, after all, only one man facing another man, and giving him his hand?) to proffer here, for fittest outset to this Book, to share with the English, the Irish, the Scottish and the Welsh,—to highest and to lowest, of These Islands —(and why not, launch'd hence, to the mainland, to the Germanic peoples—to France, Spain, Italy, Holland—to Austro-Hungary—to every Scandinavian, every Russ?) the sister's salutation of America from over Sea—the New World's Greeting-word to all, and younger brother's love.

AMERICA'S KINSHIP WITH RUSSIA

You Russians and we Americans! Our countries so distant, so unlike at first glance—such a difference in social and political conditions, and our respective methods of moral and practical development the last hundred years;—and yet in certain features, and vastest ones, so resembling each other. The variety of stock-elements and tongues, to be resolutely fused in a common identity and union at all hazards—the idea, perennial through the ages, that they both have their historic and divine mission—the fervent element of manly friendship throughout the whole people, surpass'd by no other races—the grand expanse of territorial limits and boundaries—the unform'd and nebulous state of many things, not yet permanently settled, but agreed on all hands to be the preparations of an infinitely greater future—the fact that both Peoples have their independent and leading positions to hold, keep, and if necessary, fight for, against the rest of the world—the deathless aspirations at the inmost centre of each great community, so vehement, so mysterious, so abysmic—are certainly features you Russians and we Americans possess in common.

As my dearest dream is for an internationality of poems and poets, binding the lands of the earth closer than all treaties and diplomacy—as the purpose beneath the rest in my book is such hearty comradeship, for individuals to begin with, and for all

the nations of the earth as a result—how happy I should be to get the hearing and emotional contact of the great Russian peoples.

December 20, 1881.

THE GREAT WORD SOLIDARITY

And, topping democracy, this most alluring record, that it alone can bind, and ever seeks to bind, all nations, all men, of however various and distant lands, into a brotherhood, a family. It is the old, yet ever-modern dream of earth, out of her eldest and her youngest, her fond philosophers and poets. Not that half only, individualism, which isolates. There is another half, which is adhesiveness or love, that fuses, ties and aggregates, making the races comrades, and fraternizing all. Both are to be vitalized by religion, (sole worthiest elevator of man or State,) breathing into the proud, material tissues, the breath of life. For I say at the core of democracy, finally, is the religious element. All the religions, old and new, are there. Nor may the scheme step forth, clothed in resplendent beauty and command, till these, bearing the best, the latest fruit, the spiritual, shall fully appear.

A portion of our pages we might indite with reference toward Europe, especially the British part of it, more than our own land, perhaps not absolutely needed for the home reader. But the whole question hangs together, and fastens and links all peoples. The liberalist of to-day has this advantage over antique or mediæval times, that his doctrine seeks not only to individualize but to universalize. The great word Solidarity has arisen. Of all dangers to a nation, as things exist in our day, there can be no greater one than having certain portions of the people set off from the rest by a line drawn—they not privileged as others, but degraded, humiliated, made of no account. Much quackery teems, of course, even on democracy's side, yet does not really affect the orbic quality of the matter. To work in, if we may so term it, and justify God, his divine aggregate, the People, (or, the veritable horn'd and sharp-tail'd Devil, *his* aggregate, if there be who convulsively insist upon it)—this, I say, is what

democracy is for; and this is what our America means, and is doing—may I not say, has done? If not, she means nothing more, and does nothing more, than any other land. And as, by virtue of its kosmical, antiseptic power, Nature's stomach is fully strong enough not only to digest the morbific matter always presented, not to be turn'd aside, and perhaps, indeed, intuitively gravitating thither—but even to change such contributions into nutriment for highest use and life—so American democracy's. That is the lesson we, these days, send over to European lands by every western breeze.

And, truly, whatever may be said in the way of abstract argument, for or against the theory of a wider democratizing of institutions in any civilized country, much trouble might well be saved to all European lands by recognizing this palpable fact, (for a palpable fact it is,) that some form of such democratizing is about the only resource now left. *That,* or chronic dissatisfaction continued, mutterings which grow annually louder and louder, till, in due course, and pretty swiftly in most cases, the inevitable crisis, crash, dynastic ruin. Anything worthy to be call'd statesmanship in the Old World, I should say, among the advanced students, adepts, or men of any brains, does not debate to-day whether to hold on, attempting to lean back and monarchize, or to look forward and democratize—but *how,* and in what degree and part, most prudently to democratize.

—From *Democratic Vistas*

"I project the history of the future."

9. *Address to Later Generations*

POETS TO COME

Poets to come! orators, singers, musicians to come!
Not to-day is to justify me and answer what I am for,
But you, a new brood, native, athletic, continental, greater than before known,
Arouse! for you must justify me.

I myself but write one or two indicative words for the future,
I but advance a moment only to wheel and hurry back in the darkness.

I am a man who, sauntering along without fully stopping, turns a casual look upon you and then averts his face,
Leaving it to you to prove and define it,
Expecting the main things from you.

YEARS OF THE MODERN

Years of the modern! years of the unperform'd!
Your horizon rises, I see it parting away for more august dramas,
I see not America only, not only Liberty's nation but other nations preparing,
I see tremendous entrances and exits, new combinations, the solidarity of races,
I see that force advancing with irresistible power on the world's stage,
(Have the old forces, the old wars, played their parts? are the acts suitable to them closed?)
I see Freedom, completely arm'd and victorious and very haughty, with Law on one side and Peace on the other,

A stupendous trio all issuing forth against the idea of caste;
What historic denouements are these we so rapidly approach?
I see men marching and countermarching by swift millions,
I see the frontiers and boundaries of the old aristocracies broken,
I see the landmarks of European kings removed,
I see this day the People beginning their landmarks, (all others give way;)
Never were such sharp questions ask'd as this day,
Never was average man, his soul, more energetic, more like a God,
Lo, how he urges and urges, leaving the masses no rest!
His daring foot is on land and sea everywhere, he colonizes the Pacific, the archipelagoes,
With the steamship, the electric telegraph, the newspaper, the wholesale engines of war,
With these and the world-spreading factories he interlinks all geography, all lands;
What whispers are these O lands, running ahead of you, passing under the seas?
Are all nations communing? is there going to be but one heart to the globe?
Is humanity forming en-masse? for lo, tyrants tremble, crowns grow dim,
The earth, restive, confronts a new era, perhaps a general divine war,
No one knows what will happen next, such portents fill the days and nights;
Years prophetical! the space ahead as I walk, as I vainly try to pierce it, is full of phantoms,
Unborn deeds, things soon to be, project their shapes around me,
This incredible rush and heat, this strange ecstatic fever of dreams O years!
Your dreams O years, how they penetrate through me! (I know not whether I sleep or wake;)
The perform'd America and Europe grow dim, retiring in shadow behind me,
The unperform'd, more gigantic than ever, advance, advance upon me.

THE MAIN SHAPES ARISE!

The main shapes arise!
Shapes of Democracy total, result of centuries,
Shapes ever projecting other shapes,
Shapes of turbulent manly cities,
Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,
Shapes bracing the earth and braced with the whole earth.

From *Song of the Broad-Axe*

SO LONG!

To conclude, I announce what comes after me.

I remember I said before my leaves sprang at all,
I would raise my voice jocund and strong with reference to consummations.
When America does what was promis'd,
When through these States walk a hundred millions of superb persons,
When the rest part away for superb persons and contribute to them,
When breeds of the most perfect mothers denote America,
Then to me and mine our due fruition.

I have press'd through in my own right,
I have sung the body and the soul, war and peace have I sung, and the songs of life and death,
And the songs of birth, and shown that there are many births.

I have offer'd my style to every one, I have journey'd with confident step;
While my pleasure is yet at the full I whisper *So long!*
And take the young woman's hand and the young man's hand for the last time.

I announce natural persons to arise,
I announce justice triumphant,
I announce uncompromising liberty and equality,
I announce the justification of candor and the justification of pride.

I announce that the identity of these States is a single identity only,
I announce the Union more and more compact, indissoluble,
I announce splendors and majesties to make all the previous politics of the earth insignificant.

I announce adhesiveness, I say it shall be limitless, unloosen'd,
I say you shall yet find the friend you were looking for.

I announce a man or woman coming, perhaps you are the one,
(*So long!*)
I announce the great individual, fluid as Nature, chaste, affectionate, compassionate, fully arm'd.

I announce a life that shall be copious, vehement, spiritual, bold,
I announce an end that shall lightly and joyfully meet its translation.

I announce myriads of youths, beautiful, gigantic, sweet-blooded,
I announce a race of splendid and savage old men.

O thicker and faster—(*So long!*)
O crowding too close upon me,
I foresee too much, it means more than I thought,
It appears to me I am dying.

Hasten throat and sound your last,
Salute me—salute the days once more. Peal the old cry once more.

Screaming electric, the atmosphere using,
At random glancing, each as I notice absorbing,
Swiftly on, but a little while alighting,

Curious envelop'd messages delivering,
Sparkles hot, seed ethereal down in the dirt dropping,
Myself unknowing, my commission obeying, to question it never daring,
To ages and ages yet the growth of the seed leaving,
To troops out of the war arising, they the tasks I have set promulging,
To women certain whispers of myself bequeathing, their affection me more clearly explaining,
To young men my problems offering—no dallier I—I the muscle of their brains trying,
So I pass, a little time vocal, visible, contrary,
Afterward a melodious echo, passionately bent for, (death making me really undying,)
The best of me then when no longer visible, for toward that I have been incessantly preparing.

What is there more, that I lag and pause and crouch extended with unshut mouth?
Is there a single final farewell?

My songs cease, I abandon them,
From behind the screen where I hid I advance personally solely to you.

Camerado, this is no book,
Who touches this touches a man,
(Is it night? are we here together alone?)
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms—decease calls me forth.

O how your fingers drowse me,
Your breath falls around me like dew, your pulse lulls the tympans of my ears,
I feel immerged from head to foot,
Delicious, enough.

Enough O deed impromptu and secret,
Enough O gliding present—enough O summ'd-up past.

Dear friend whoever you are take this kiss,
I give it especially to you, do not forget me,
I feel like one who has done work for the day to retire awhile,
I receive now again of my many translations, from my avataras ascending, while others doubtless await me,
An unknown sphere more real than I dream'd, more direct, darts awakening rays about me, *So long!*
Remember my words, I may again return,
I love you, I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.

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CLIFTON JOSEPH FURNESS:

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